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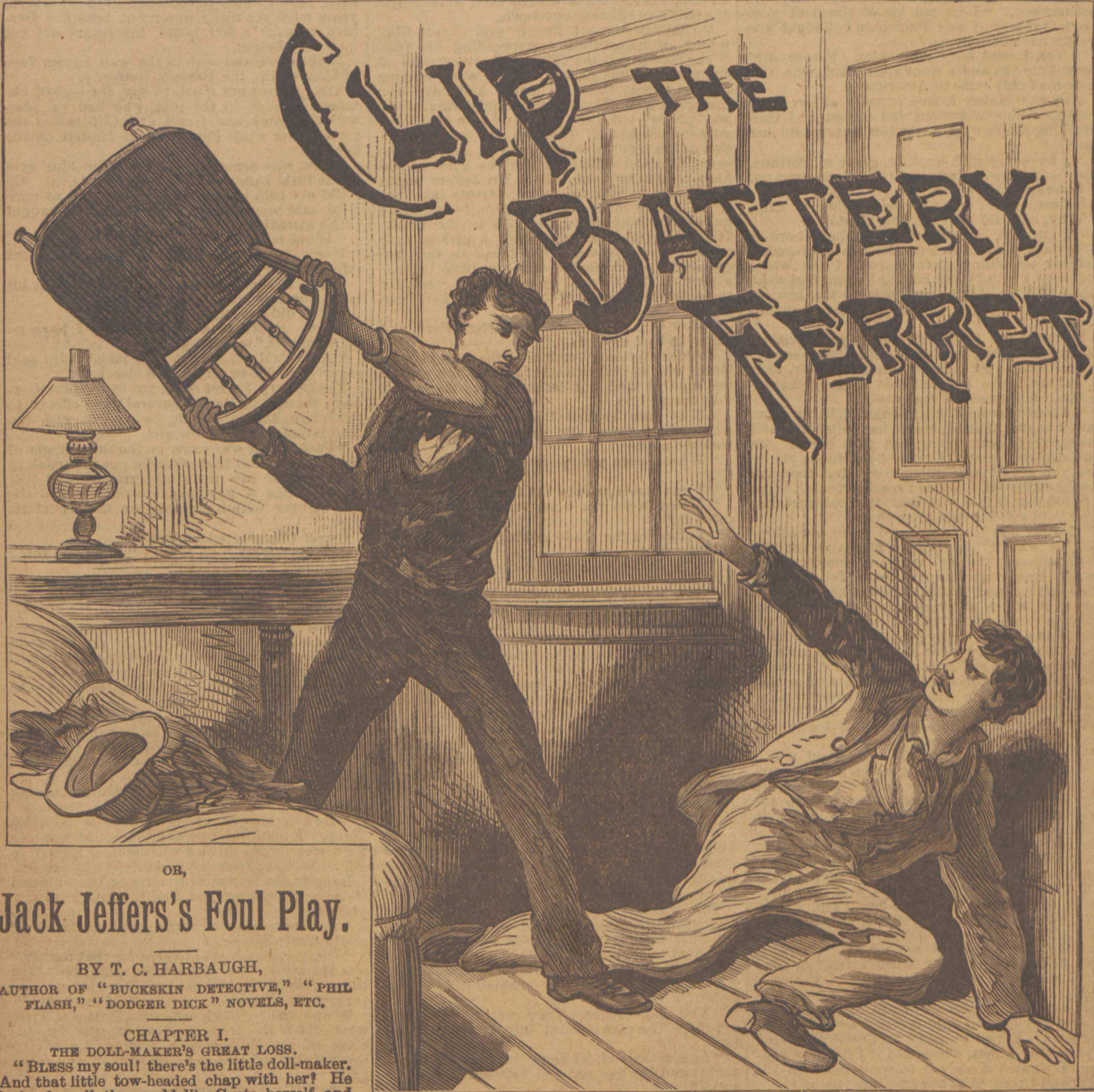
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OR, Jack Jeffers's Foul Play.

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AUTHOR OF "BUCKSKIN DETECTIVE," "PHIL FLASH," "DODGER DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE DOLL-MAKER'S GREAT LOSS.

"BLESS my soul! there's the little doll-maker. And that little tow-headed chap with her? He looks for all the world like Gusta herself, and the chances are that he's her brother. I've missed Gusta for some time, and I'll bet my head

"OPEN THE DOOR!" CRIED THE IMPRISONED CLIP. "OPEN IT NOW OR I'LL DASH YOUR BRAINS OUT."

that she's been back to the Old Country after the boy."

The boy who spoke thus, addressing himself, sat on one of the benches in Battery Park, one afternoon, while a lot of newly-arrived immigrants were pouring out of Castle Garden, and taking their first look at their new home.

He was a boy well known to those who frequented the Battery, and to the police and others he was known as the Battery Ferret, and sometimes as the Battery Butterfly, for on warm days he was almost sure to be found on one of the benches, watching the people, and seeming to have nothing else to do.

But, Clever Clip was a busy boy for all his apparent idleness, and more than one poor immigrant he had saved from the hands of the fleecers who used to frequent the Park, and rob them of their little all before they had obtained a glimpse of the New World.

When he saw the girl and her little brother approaching, he left his bench and went toward them.

In a moment the girl recognized him, and held out her hand, while a smile brightened her face.

"I am glad to see you, Clip," said she. "This is Paul, my little brother, and we came in yesterday."

"Yesterday, Gusta?" asked the boy, in amazement. "I did not know you had gone back, but when I saw Paul here I thought you might have been home."

"Yes, I went back after him. Father died some time ago and I went after Paul, who will now make his home in America."

Augusta Muller looked proudly at her little brother who was a stout lad of ten, and then catching Clip's eyes, a shadow overspread her face.

"I have met with another great misfortune, but I hope it will come out right," she went on. "I have lost my trunk."

"Lost your trunk?" cried Clever Clip. "Why, how did that happen, Gusta?"

"I guess it was all my fault, but there is something connected with the loss that makes me fear something dark is behind the whole matter. I came back hoping I could find some trace of it, or obtain some clue to the man to whom I intrusted it, but so far I have been unsuccessful."

"That is too bad," said the boy. "But, sit down here on the bench and tell me your story."

The German girl, who was a doll-maker, took a seat beside the boy and told a story that interested him from the first word.

"About two months ago I got a letter from father saying that his health had failed him and asking me to come home and take care of him until the end came. I did not get to see you to tell you that I was going back, but took the first steamer out. When I reached the old home I found that father was near the end and that soon Paul and I would be orphans.

"Father had been estranged from a wealthy brother who, dying, forgave him and left him a fortune of twenty thousand marks. This money would at father's death fall to little Paul and me, and he told us how to keep it and to add to it, which we promised to do. We lived, when in Germany, at the edge of a little village, and a great many people who came over from this country went through the town in carriages to see the country. I had discovered that father had become acquainted with a man who said he was an American of some wealth. At any rate, he was a clever man and when I got home he offered his services to me in any way I might find them acceptable.

"After the funeral, and when Paul and I found ourselves alone in the world, this man, whose name was Jackson Jeffers, advised me to conceal the twenty thousand marks in the old trunk which I had concluded to bring to this country when we came back. He said this was the best way to hide it as no one would think of looking there for money, and he assisted me in hiding it in the lining of the trunk. I must confess that he was very kind, and a few days before Paul and I left the village, he bade us good-bye, saying that business had called him to another part of the empire and that he could not see us off. We came over in the steerage and when I reached New York and found my trunk all right I was very glad, for the twenty thousand marks were safe and we could exchange them for American money and have enough to keep us the rest of our lives. When we came to Castle Garden I was met by a man who asked if I had any baggage I wanted conveyed to some point in the city, and I pointed to the precious trunk.

"That was the last I saw of it."

"The last sight of your trunk containing your fortune?" cried the Battery Butterfly.

"I never saw it again," said Gusta with a deeply drawn sigh and a pitying glance at little Paul, who was admiring the uniform of one of the Park police. "It vanished as if the earth had opened and swallowed it. I haven't seen the man since who took it off and that is why I am here to-day."

"What was this man like?"

"He looked like the ordinary hackman," answered the doll-maker. "I thought him honest, of course, and as he offered to take the trunk to our house so cheaply, I let him have the job."

For a moment Clever Clip said nothing. He looked at Gusta Muller and her brother and felt for them from the bottom of his heart.

"Give me a full description of this man," he said at last. "Tell me just what he looked like, what sort of a wagon he had and all about him."

The girl did so, saying at the conclusion of her description, that she thought that perhaps the man might have delivered the trunk to the wrong house and she had expected to find him in the Park waiting for another job.

After awhile Clip persuaded Gusta to go home, promising her that he would do all in his power to trace the lost trunk and he even walked with the pair some distance up-town.

"That's downright theft!" said Clever Clip, a flush of indignation overspreading his face. "The poor girl is the victim of a clever plot on the part of some rascals. They were playing for the twenty thousand marks and have won the game, too. The plot began in Germany and was played out here, or at any rate that's the way it looks to me. The man who took possession of the trunk was laying for it, and when he saw Gusta and little Paul land he knew he had his victim in his hand. That Mr. Jeffers might have had a hand in the plot, for Gusta says that if he hadn't made the suggestion she wouldn't have thought of hiding the bills in the trunk. It's a cool plot against as nice a girl as ever crossed the sea to make her home in this free country, and to see her and her little brother robbed in this manner by a set of sharpers, for there must be a gang of them, is more than I can stand."

Clever Clip went back to Battery Park and began to look around.

The description given him of the hackman by Gusta who had taken a good look at him was all the clue he had, but he saw no one answering that description.

All at once he hailed a boy of his own age who came forward and wanted to know what was the matter.

"Where were you yesterday, Bunce?" asked Clip.

"I was here a part of the time."

"Where were you when the immigrant ship came in?"

"Lolling in the shade looking at the comical citizens we got on her."

"You didn't see a girl and a boy land, did you, Bunce?"

"Saw dozens of them. They had queer-looking handkerchiefs round their heads and looked for all the world like—I don't know what."

"But I want to know if you saw a girl make a bargain with a man to take her trunk to a certain part of the city?"

"Didn't I, though?" laughed Bunce, the Battery loafer. "And such an old looking trunk it was! It had a dozen straps around it to keep it from falling to pieces and I couldn't see any lock. I guess the straps were all the 'combination' it had, and when the man threw it on the wagon I hollered to him to be careful with the old box or he would have a collapse the first crossing he struck."

"Did you know the man?"

"Never saw him before. He didn't seem to know the ropes for he could have got several other jobs, but he seemed to be looking for the girl and boy, and the moment he corralled the trunk off he went as if fired from a cannon."

This was something and the eye of Clever Clip lit up with renewed hope.

"That man hasn't been back here to-day for I wanted to ask him if the old trunk held together till he got it home," continued Bunce. "I thought I saw the couple here while ago."

"You did, Bunce. They were down here around. The man turned into Broadway, did he?"

"I guess he did. I know he went off like a rocket and the boy and girl watched him out of sight."

"They should have gone with him," said

Clever Clip aloud to himself, but the next moment he turned and looked at Bunce.

"Would you know the hackman if you saw him again?"

"If he was dressed like he was yesterday, yes, but I don't think you'll catch him in the same feathers again."

"Why not?"

"He never was cut out for that kind of work. Why, it looked to me like a harpy pouncing down upon a lamb. He was laying for that old trunk, or I'm no Park lizard. No, he won't come back, Clip. That man is out of a job now."

"You are right," said the Battery Butterfly, looking at the boy at his side. "He will have to look very careful if he doesn't see the inside of a penitentiary."

CHAPTER II.

IS IT A CLUE.

AUGUSTA MULLER and her brother went home disconsolate.

Little Paul was hardly old enough to realize the extent of their loss, but "Gusta," as she was called, his kind, big-hearted sister, felt it in all its bearings and when they had returned to the small rooms where the girl had lived for several years while she made queer but beautiful German dolls for a doll house, the future did not look very bright.

Night came and with it the well known face of Clever Clip, the Battery Butterfly.

The boy had not much to say, for he had obtained no clue to the man who had vanished with the trunk and Gusta and Clip talked the matter over while Paul amused himself on the floor.

There was something in the large blue eyes of the little Dutch boy that captivated Clip. He could not help looking at them and all at once Paul said something to his sister that caught Clip's attention.

"What is that he said, Gusta?" cried the boy. "Wasn't he talking about the man who went off with your baggage?"

"Yes, he said he had a fine gold ring on his hand, one that sparkled in the sunlight."

"You did not see it, Gusta?"

"No. Paul has sharp eyes and I have no doubt he did," said the girl.

"Ask Paul all about the ring," Clip said eagerly. "There might be a clue here."

The Battery Ferret could not understand German, though Gusta had several times offered to teach him, and he had to be content with the translations made by the girl.

"Paul says it was worn on the third finger of the left hand and that when he put the trunk in the wagon he saw the ring distinctly and that it looked like a gold snake wound round the man's finger with a diamond on the top of its head."

Clever Clip started violently.

"Great Caesar!" he cried. "Don't you think Paul might be mistaken?"

"I never knew him to be, for, as I have said, he has the keenest eyes I ever saw. I will ask him again."

For a moment the Mullers talked rapidly and Clip saw that Paul was just as positive as he could be. He answered his sister's question with some spirit and, taking a pencil, drew on a bit of paper on the table a picture of the hand with the ring on the third finger.

"I can't shake Paul's testimony," smiled Gusta. "He is as positive as he can be that it was just such a ring as he had described and—"

"I know a man who wears a ring like that," said Clip.

"Heavens! you do?" exclaimed Gusta, opening her great brown eyes to their fullest extent.

"He's a lawyer and his name is Nicholas Nabb. I made his acquaintance last summer for I was jerked up as a witness in a matter in which he was interested and all the while he was talking to me he was drumming on the table and showing me a ring just like the one Paul saw yesterday."

"But there may be many rings of that sort," put in Gusta Muller.

"Oh, yes, hundreds of them for that matter," was the reply. "But this thing might be looked into. Maybe Mr. Nabb has lost his ring, and perhaps Paul saw it on the hand of the finder."

It was eight o'clock when the Battery Ferret went down the steps leading to the humble home of the Mullers, and finding himself on the well-lighted streets, he started off at a rapid gait.

"So little Paul saw the serpent ring on the hand of the man who took hold of the trunk?"

he said. "That's rather queer, and it's worth looking into."

He turned into another street, and kept on until half-way across the city he stopped and looked up at a window where there was a light, showing that the office beyond was occupied at that hour.

The building was one occupied by lawyers and others who did business in the police courts, and when Clip had watched the window some time, he slipped into the open hallway and went up the darkened steps.

He was just stepping into the hall above when a door opened ahead, and there came into the corridor a man upon whom for a moment fell a flood of light.

"Heigho! Mr. Nabb", mentally exclaimed the Battery Ferret, as he drew back and watched the man standing in the light, as he talked with some one left in the office.

He was a tall, fine-looking man, dressed in the height of the prevailing style, and held a cigar between his teeth.

"I'll attend to that matter to-night," said Nabb to the unseen. "I am going past the house, and will step in and see the old lady for myself."

"Make every arrangement, for there's no telling how far we will have to go in the matter," was the reply, and then the door was closed and Clever Clip, the young shadow, saw the man come down the hall.

Nicholas Nabb passed Clip without so much as getting a glimpse of him, which was very fortunate for the boy, and when he had passed out, Clip darted after him in a jiffy.

"I'll not let this opportunity pass," he said. "I'll just see who you are going to call on as you go down-town, Mr. Nabb."

The firm of Nabb & Nippem did not enjoy the best of reputations; that is, the two men were noted for chicanery, and it was said that they were ready to resort to anything to clear their clients who found themselves in tight places. They were not looked up to by their brother lawyers, and consequently they were not much thought of by honest members of the bar.

Nicholas Nabb went down-town, walking rapidly, while he appeared to enjoy his cigar, and never thought that he had the Battery Butterfly at his heels.

After walking several squares Nabb turned into a side street and ran nimbly up the steps of a common-place house which stood behind several shade trees.

When the door was opened he spoke to the person in the hall and was admitted.

The shutting of the door seemed to put an end to Clip's espionage, but, nothing daunted, he slipped up to the house and drawing himself up to the window, he discovered that he could see into the front room.

For a moment he saw nothing and then a woman entered the room and greeted Nicholas Nabb with a smirk.

She was past fifty for her hair was gray and she wore some of it in bangs over her forehead. A profusion of jewelry adorned her person, and altogether she looked to Clip like a keener who knew how to get along in the world.

The boy at the window strained his ears to catch any words that might pass between the pair and it was some time before he heard anything intelligible.

"Of course I am to be paid well for what I do?" said the woman.

"Of course, Mrs. Flounder. We don't expect you to undertake any thing for us unless we pay you well. But, maybe we won't have any thing for you to do. I only dropped in to say that we might have a job, you know."

Mrs. Flounder bowed and looked at Nabb.

"How is Mr. Nippem doing now?" she asked.

"Nippem, my partner? Oh, he's doing well, thank you."

"You still hold forth in the Belgium Block, do you?"

"Yes, but you understand, Mrs. Flounder, that it wouldn't do at this time for you to call?"

"Don't be afraid of that. I'm not going to quit my native heath to get any of my friends into trouble. I'll be discreet enough for both of you, and if you two are half as shrewd as I, you will get through the world without any trouble."

This was not much, but still it told the Battery Butterfly something. It told him that Nicholas Nabb was acquainted with the woman, and that the firm was likely to give her something to do in the near future, but this was not very certain. All the time Clip was looking at Nabb's hand, but he could not make out the style of the ring that graced one finger.

At times he thought it looked like a serpent and then he seemed to notice that it was a plain

gold affair, and it was not until the lawyer turned to the door that he got a good look at the bauble.

It was a golden serpent sure enough and just the kind described by little Paul Muller.

The diamond flashed in the light as the lawyer stopped underneath the jet to relight his cigar, and when he crossed the room Clip dropped to the ground and ran to one of the trees where he stood in the shadows like a statue.

He saw Nicholas Nabb come out of the house and walk off. When the door had closed Clip got on his trail again and tracked him to a small eating house where Nicholas ordered a grill and sat down to enjoy it.

"That's enough for one trip," said the Battery Butterfly. "I don't know who took the trunk, but I've seen a ring like the one worn by the man who did take it, thanks to Paul Muller's eyes."

Half an hour later Clever Clip entered a room where he seemed at home for he flung his hat upon a couch and sat down.

Clip was at home. He had lived in an humble room for more than a year, managing by odd jobs to pick up enough to pay the rent and get clothing and meals, the latter not very regular, but regular enough for him.

"This plot against the orphans' fortunes gets blacker and blacker the deeper I go into it," he said. "I don't know what to make out of it yet, but I'm going to the end of the string. Shall I tell Captain Cupid? No, I won't do it yet. I may need his services before long, but I am going to help Gusta and little Paul all alone for the present."

The clocks in the neighborhood struck ten and Clip went out.

"I'll drop into Delmonico's and get a lunch," said he and entering a small restaurant, he shouted: "Hello there, Buster! Soup and sandwich—a pea in the former and meat in the latter. And fetch it to table number ten in a jiffy!" and tripping to one corner of the room, he sat down and waited for his order.

The humble restaurant was Clever Clip's "Delmonico's."

CHAPTER III.

THE MAN FROM OVER SEA.

THE night after the events we have just chronicled an old man who was known to deal in all sorts of money received at his door a visitor at whom he looked twice before admitting him.

Old Jason Sixpence, as he was called because of his love for the remotest coin, finally admitted the man at the door and took him to the dingy little room where he transacted all his business.

The oddest thing about this visitor was that he wore a false beard, something which the old money exchanger saw at once and this made him feel a little uneasy.

"Do you want some Dutch money?" said the man's caller.

"What have you got?"

Old Jason was careful, never letting any one get the best of him in any way.

"I've got a little German money and want some of Uncle Sam's bills for it."

"Let me see it."

The man with the false beard opened his coat and then his waistcoat, watched all the time like a hawk by the old man. Finally he took from beneath his shirt a package which made the old fellow's eyes water with delight for here was a chance of driving another hard bargain and making a good margin before he went to bed.

When the stranger had counted out hundreds of dollars in German bills Jason Sixpence reached across the table and stopped him.

"Goodness gracious!" he cried, "where did you get so much money?"

"Never mind that. I asked you if you wanted some German money and you said you did. Now I am showing you what I have and I want some other stuff for it."

Old Jason said no more but let the man go on, and when he had counted out ten thousand marks he looked up and smiled.

"That's the pile. Now, what can you do?"

The money-changer knew what they would give the man at any bank for the pile of bills; but he wanted to drive a better bargain and so he told the stranger what he would give him for the amount he had counted out.

"Hand it over," said the man, leaning back in the chair and looking up at Jason. "Hand it over, I say, and we'll conclude the transaction in a jiffy. But I don't want anything said

about this. I can get you more of the same sort if you want it. I know where it is," and the speaker smiled.

Jason Sixpence went to his safe and came back with a handful of United States money which he proceeded to count out, taking in place of it the German bills the stranger had deposited on his table.

"Do you want some more?" asked this man.

"At the same rates?"

"Yes."

"I'll take all you have. How much have you?"

"Nearly as much more."

"Bring it on."

The stranger gathered up the bills which Old Jason had placed upon the board and buttoned his coat over them.

In another moment he had turned to bid the money-shark good-night.

"I'll bring the rest on in a day or so," he said. "I get a good deal of this sort of money in my business and of course I'd rather have United States money. It gives you a chance to make a little something and I am willing to let you do that, you see."

The speaker was escorted to the door of Jason Sixpence's den and soon found himself on the street.

"That transaction didn't take up much time and everything was in order," he chuckled to himself. "Now I want to get out of this disguise."

He entered a passing car and was carried to near the East River where he alighted and entered a house which he seemed to recognize as home.

When he had reached a room where the gas was burning, he pulled off the false beard and laughed over the success of his little negotiation with Old Jason.

Now he was a good-looking man, with keen brown eyes and a smooth face which was round and full. He took a seat at the only table in the room and counted over the money he had received from the money sharp.

"It's all O. K." he said aloud. "Of course I let the old hog take a little more than the usual exchange, but it was safer there than in any other place. Now for the other part of the little game."

For some time longer he remained cooped up in the little room and then went down-stairs.

He had barely touched the sidewalk when he was accosted by a man against whom he nearly ran.

"What, you?" he cried, drawing back in astonishment, and then going forward the next moment. "When did you get in?"

"About two hours ago. We had a rough passage of it, got too far out of our course and at one time thought we were going down to see the mermaids. But luckily we got back into the path and outweathered the gales. Tired? Well, I should say so. Of course you attended to your part of the affair?"

There was a smile on the face of the man who heard these words and without ado he led the speaker back into the house and up-stairs where he took a chair without invitation and stretched his legs as if they had been cramped for days.

"Have any trouble?" this man asked.

"Not much. Everything seemed to play into our hands on both sides, eh?"

"You saw them land?"

"That's what my eyes were for."

"She didn't suspect you?"

"No; these German girls are as simple as simplicity itself. The boy will be a keener, though."

"Little Paul?"

"Is that his name? I believe you did write us to this effect. No, they did not seem to suspect, but the boy took a good look at me and he seems to have a memory, or I'm mistaken in the chap."

"It's all right, though. I did my part, but it took a little coaxing. You see she did not want to hide the bills in the old trunk and would not until I explained that the custom house officers would take them from her if they found them on her person and she has the nature of all Germans; she wants to keep all she can get and when she believed my story, the money went into the old trunk and I helped her put it there."

"And cleared out yourself?"

"Yes; you may be sure I didn't want to come over in the same vessel with her. I told her that 'business' had called me to another part of the empire and that some time I would meet her in this city."

"Well, you can do that any time and I guess you might as well do it soon."

"Why soon?"

"Well, you see she might tell some friend about the missing baggage and the police might get hold of it."

"Who is her mainstay?"

"She is a person of few acquaintances," was the reply. "She makes dolls, as you know—makes them at home, and has few if any confidantes. She used to have a friend employed in one of the barge offices, a young German who is rather bright; but I haven't seen him for several months, and, then, she knows a boy called the Battery Ferret—one of these ne'er-do-wells who frequent the parks and piers of New York."

"A gutter-snipe, eh?"

"Yes, he's built on that order."

"He knows the doll-maker, does, he?"

"They have been friends for some time."

"She might tell him, or might go to the police with the story of the missing trunk."

"I don't think she's done either yet," said the man who had been to Old Jason's den. "We must make everything safe. Perhaps you had better go to her and see what she thinks about it. You know what to do and as she put a good deal of confidence in you in the old country, she might confide in you yet."

"I'll see to that," suddenly laughed the newly arrived ocean passenger. "She did just as I told her over there, and I guess she'll do pretty much the same in America."

Both men laughed together and lighted cigars.

"What's left of the trunk?" suddenly asked the passenger.

"Oh it's out of the way. Don't let that bother you."

"You had sense enough to make it disappear, I hope?"

"It's gone, I say."

By and by the passenger arose and threw the stump of his cigar into the cuspidor.

"I'm going back to my old rooms to see how they look after a few weeks' absence," he said. "I'll see you to-morrow and, by the way, I'll hunt Gusta up at the same time."

"Play it fine, remember."

"Just as if I couldn't do that without advice to that effect! I know a thing or two when I'm in a game. How's Solon?"

"All O. K."

"Still in the fleecing business with his illustrious partner, eh?"

"Of course," was the laughing rejoinder and with this the passenger of the last steamship went out, leaving the echoes of his last remarks behind him.

"He didn't say a word about the money but that's his way," remarked the man left behind. "He knows that everything is all right and can afford to wait till the whole game is played out. Then we'll divide and hold our tongues."

Meanwhile, the passenger had reached the street and was hurrying off under the hundred-and-one lamps that showed him the pavement of Gotham.

"I'm glad they did their work so neatly at this end of the line," he said to himself. "It looks like business. Yes, I'll see Gusta to-morrow."

CHAPTER IV.

CAUSE FOR QUICK ACTION.

It was just ten o'clock the next day when Gusta Muller put aside a half-finished doll to answer a startling knock at the door of her humble little home.

She had been thinking of the great loss she had sustained and of the mystery surrounding the theft of the trunk and her fortune and when she opened the door she hardly knew where she was, or what she was doing.

But the moment she caught sight of the man standing there she fell back with a cry.

"Mr. Jeffers! Why, I have thought of you many times since we came back and have wondered where you were. Here, Paul! here is your friend who took you long walks in Germany while father was sick and—"

Little Paul had run forward and his cry broke his sister's sentence.

The man caught the boy by the hand and was soon seated in the room while Paul, glad to see him, climbed upon his lap and from there looked into his really handsome face.

As for Gusta, a look of anguish overspread her countenance and she said with a sigh:

"We got here safe and sound so far as our bodies are concerned; but the trunk was not so fortunate."

The man appeared to start.

"Not so fortunate?" he echoed. "Why, what happened to the trunk, Gusta?"

"We lost it."

"While coming over?"

"No, after we had reached New York," and she proceeded and told the story of the theft of the trunk in pretty much the same language she had used in relating the incident to Clever Clip.

The man seemed to listen as if he knew nothing at all of this affair and when Gusta finished he said in tones that would deceive the most suspicious:

"This may not be so bad as it looks. This is a great city, Gusta, and there may be other Gusta Mullers. I will look into the matter for you and I think we will have the old trunk back safe and sound in a short time."

"How kind you are, Mr. Jeffers!" cried the unsophisticated German girl.

"You haven't told the police yet, have you?"

"Not yet."

"Not mentioned the matter to any one?"

Gusta hesitated.

"Yes, sir, I told Clip," she said.

"And who is Clip?"

"He is a boy whom I know, a dear friend of mine."

The man smiled.

"Well, what has Clip done in the matter?" he asked.

"He is doing all he can. If you could see Clip, I am sure you two would work together."

There was no reply for a moment, but the man Jeffers was seen to frown by the keen-eyed little Paul.

"Where does Clip live? I'll go and see him," he said at last.

Gusta, who knew where the Battery Ferret lived when at home, did not hesitate to give him the desired information, and Jackson Jeffers seemed to make a mental note of the address.

"I am very sorry to hear of the loss of the trunk," he said. "But as we are the only persons who know what it contained, it will not be examined very closely, and when we rectify the mistake all will be well."

"Then you call it a mistake, do you?"

"What else can it be?" was the quick answer. "No one knew where the money was, and the hackman must have taken the trunk to another Gusta Muller, who may be wondering how the mistake could have happened. These drivers are careless fellows, anyhow; they leave a trunk on front steps, and are off in a jiffy, with no explanations and no excuses for their act."

"I hope that is the correct solution of the whole matter," said the pretty doll-maker.

"Who was that man?" cried the boy, who burst into Gusta's chamber a moment after she had let Jackson Jeffers out.

"That is Mr. Jeffers, the gentleman who helped us in Germany," was the reply. "I wish you had come a minute sooner."

"I don't," said Clever Clip. "I came just soon enough, if I know anything, Gusta."

"He wants to see you."

"I have no doubt of that. Jackson Jeffers, eh, and the man who advised you to pack the twenty thousand marks in the old trunk?"

"Yes, he did that, Clip—"

"And the first thing you knew after reaching this city you had no trunk and no money?"

"That is true, also, but—"

"I'll see you later, Gusta," and bursting from the room the Battery Butterfly ran down and began to look for the man of whom he had caught but a passing glimpse.

This, however, was quite enough to cause him to want to know more about the man, and when he saw a figure that resembled Jeffers's walking toward the corner, he bounded forward and saw that his eyes had not deceived him.

Jackson Jeffers was walking along, proud, no doubt, of the fact that he had played a fine hand against the unsuspecting girl, and Clip shadowed him until he saw him enter the hallway leading up to the office of Nabb & Nippem.

"Hello, Solon!" cried Jeffers, advancing across the room with outstretched hand to greet a thin-faced, eagle-eyed man who had turned upon him as the door opened. "I'm back safe and sound from the land of pretzels and beer. And here's Nabb, too! I saw him last night, but—"

"Come here, Jeffers—quick!"

The man from over-sea ran to the front window where Nicholas Nabb was standing, and the lawyer, catching his arm, said in a husky voice:

"That's the young friend; that's the boy who loafes on the Battery with a pair of keen eyes in his head."

At the same time he pointed down into the street where stood Clip, the Battery Butterfly,

looking up for a moment at the windows of the office.

"So that is the shadow on the trail, eh?" he said, through his teeth, from the way his voice sounded. "That is Gusta's friend, is it?"

"That is the boy."

At this moment Clip withdrew and looking after him a second Jackson Jeffers turned to the thin-faced man who was watching him like a falcon.

"I've just come from the girl's," he said.

"Not from the doll-maker's?" cried Nippem.

"From nowhere else. The girl believes everything I say, just as she did in the old country. She hasn't told the police yet and the sole person who knows from her anything about the loss of the old hair-trunk is the boy I've just looked at. Never mind him. I've photographed him on the sensitive plate of my memory and will take care of all such stumbling-blocks."

Nicholas Nabb smiled and brought out the inseparable cigars.

"I've seen Mrs. Flounder and she is willing to help us for a moderate consideration," he said.

Nippem, the oldest of the trio, twisted uneasily in his chair and said something about being careful how they trusted Mrs. Flounder, whereupon Nabb cried out:

"She was your client once and got the best of you when the day of settlement came. That's why you don't like her, Nippem. But we can't get along without her, and as I knew her long before she blossomed out as a city rose, I can say for her that she never gives up a secret and serves those who pay her well and don't suspicion her of double dealing. You may not like her, Nippem, but I'll tie to Minerva Flounder and if we get into a tight place, she'll do her part in helping us out."

This settled the senior member of the firm of Nabb & Nippem and Jackson Jeffers, rubbing his hands, said gleefully:

"I was royally received. The boy fairly hugged the life out of me. He is sharp and quick-witted just like his father. He's got eyes in his head that can look through a brick wall—"

"When there's a hole in it," put in Nabb.

"Of course," said Jeffers. "Now I want to know what's become of the trunk."

He was looking at Nicholas Nabb and for a moment that worthy coughed and seemed to swallow hard.

"It's all right. Didn't I tell you that last night?"

"But I want to know just how it's all right," was the reply.

"He went and sold it and thus turned an honest penny for cigars," said Nippem with a grin.

"Holy smoke! you sold it, did you?" cried Jackson Jeffers, nearly falling from his chair. "In the name of Davy Crockett and Dan'l Boone, you don't want to give the police a clue, I hope! You don't want to be gobbled in before you've had any enjoyment out of the swag?"

Nicholas Nabb seemed to lose color, but the next moment he smiled and said:

"I knew what I was doing. I sold that trunk to an old man who will see that it never sees the light. He deals in such things, but he never gives any one away and it's safe where it is, as though I had filled it with stones and thrown it from the big bridge or fed it to the fire."

"Where is it?"

There was a certain savageness about Jackson Jeffers's look that frightened Nicholas Nabb. He bent forward and looked him in the eye with a malignity that savored of insanity.

"I don't care what you think. I want to be safe all around. Where's that trunk?"

"You'll find it at old Dobby's, Bowery."

"Good-night, gentlemen. I'll see you later," and picking up his hat Jeffers, to the astonishment of the legal sharks, rushed from the room and seemed to go down-stairs three steps at a time.

CHAPTER V.

THE KIDDED SCAMP.

THE episode of the serpent-headed ring was nearly enough in Clip's mind to identify the man who had taken Gusta Muller's trunk from the Battery.

He had seen a ring like it on the left hand of Nicholas Nabb during that worthy's interview with Mrs. Flounder, and this circumstance had about settled the matter in the boy's mind.

The more he thought over the matter the more he became convinced that the two lawyers

were at the bottom of the affair, but the question was: "How am I to fasten the crime upon them and get the girl's fortune back?"

He knew that it would be hard to make Gusta believe that Jackson Jeffers, the man who had been so kind to her in Germany, was a rascal and not a gentleman.

She was a simple German girl, raised in the belief that the whole world was honest and that a man who had the address and good-nature of Jack Jeffers could not be dishonest, while Clip had come to the conclusion that he was but another member of the cabal and had played his hand across the sea.

He believed that, having induced Gusta to hide her fortune in the old trunk, Jeffers had written his confederates in this country all about the transaction, and that when Gusta and little Paul landed, Nicholas Nabb was on hand to nab the trunk which he had done in the most approved style of robbery.

Gusta had told Clip that more than a week had intervened between the hiding of the money in the trunk and her departure for the seaboard and this would have given Jeffers time to send a letter in advance of her, as ships were sailing nearly day.

When Clip, the Battery Butterfly, went back from watching Jack Jeffers to the office of the lawyers, he was trying to mature a plan by which he could get at the secrets of the three men and concluded to turn his attention to the man who had just crossed the sea, as he believed him one of the most dangerous of the trio.

"So he is going to call on me, is he?" the boy said to himself. "He told Gusta so and I am anxious to meet him. This man Jeffers showed his hand in Germany and poor Gusta intrusted her fortune to him, for when she hid it in the trunk she virtually gave it up to the biggest rascal that ever breathed."

Clever Clip waited all that day for the expected visit and when night came he had nearly given Jack up.

Clip was about to go down upon the street when he heard steps ascending the stairs leading to his room and a moment later a knock sounded on the door.

"Come in," said the boy detective, and the very man he was looking for entered.

Jack Jeffers had the appearance of a gentleman well-to-do and was really handsome.

He came forward with a smile, introducing himself as a friend of Gusta's and when he had sat down, he went on:

"I am glad that you are her friend. Gusta is a fine girl who is trying to get along in the world. She has lately sustained two great losses. In the first place, her father was taken from her and then she lost her trunk which contained something like a fortune."

"Yes, I know about that," answered Clip. "I have heard about the missing trunk and I've fears that she has seen the last of it."

Jack Jeffers shook his head.

"I don't know about that," he said, doubtfully. "I think it can be recovered, for I don't think any one would deliberately steal the baggage of a poor German girl."

Clip looked at the speaker half astonished, but did not betray himself.

"You mean, miserable rascal?" he thought. "You know all about this theft. You are the man who planned it and here you say that you don't think any one would rob Gusta Muller."

"We might work up this case together," continued Jack. "I've been thinking of this and as you seem to know the city well from what Gusta has told me, I am quite sure that with a little work we can trace the trunk which is so precious to the two children."

"I am willing to do anything to help Gusta," said the boy. "I am her friend, as she has told you. What do you advise, Mr. Jeffers?"

"My opinion is that the trunk was taken to the wrong address."

"But don't you think the mistake ought to have been discovered ere this?"

"I don't know."

"Wouldn't it be a good idea to go to the police with whole story?"

"Heavens, no!" cried Jeffers, with a sudden start. "We don't want to make too much fuss about this little matter. We can ferret it all out ourselves and not let Gusta's name get into the newspapers. The girl don't want publicity; she doesn't care to let the world know that she, a poor German girl, has fallen heir to an estate. Why, she would be bothered by cranks and the business of doll-making would be seriously interrupted."

Clip, who was only "trying" Jeffers with his suggestion, could not help smiling at the man's nervousness. The police, Clip had made

up his mind, should not hear of the robbery until he had exhausted every point of recovery, and when he mentioned the matter to Jeffers he had no idea of sending the story of the robbery to Inspector Byrnes.

"Well, go on, Mr. Jeffers," said the boy, settling back in his chair.

Jack said he had not matured any special plan, but his idea was to trace the trunk, if possible, to its landing place, for he was sure it had been taken off by a backman who had misunderstood Gusta's directions.

The oily scamp still persisted in his declaration that the girl had not been robbed intentionally; he was quite sure she had not, and was equally sure that a little detective work would result in finding the baggage.

"Now," said he, leaning toward Clip, "I have a friend in the city who is quite an adept at recovering lost property. She is a wonderful woman and I have seen her powers tested."

"Is she in the business of finding lost things?" asked Clip, who had heard of clairvoyants and fortune-tellers, though he never took any stock in their pretensions.

"She is not a professional," was the reply. "She lives quietly and helps those who come to her not for money but from a desire to do all the good she can."

"A sort of woman philanthropist, eh?"

"Something of that sort."

Clip wondered who this wonderful woman was, but he did not show his eagerness by asking.

"My friend's name is Mrs. Minerva Flounder," continued Jack, "I have known her some years and can recommend her."

The Battery Butterfly did not start, but it was only with the greatest effort that he was enabled to maintain his composure. Mrs. Flounder, the woman visited by Nicholas Nabb, was coming to the front again."

"If you will visit her in my name and narrate the circumstances to her she will take the trail and maybe do us more good than all the detectives in the city."

Clip asked for Mrs. Flounder's address and Jeffers handed it to him.

"Will you see her?"

"That's just what I will do," said the boy. "I am anxious to get Gusta's trunk back and if your friend, Mrs. Flounder, can help us, why, she will be doing a poor girl a favor, too."

"Certainly she will, and Mrs. Flounder has a kind heart in her bosom and will do all she can. She has recovered some lost things that baffled the skill of the police, and she will do us all the good she can. If you could go to her, say, within the next two hours, I don't think you would find her very busy and she will take up this matter for us at once."

"I will go at once," replied Clip.

"I wouldn't go for, say, an hour, anyway. That will be time enough and then you will not be apt to find her busy."

Ten minutes later the feet of Jack Jeffers went down the steps and Clever Clip was alone in his little room. He had played his part very well, he thought, dissembling so as to deceive the rascal who had called, and when he thought of the visit he had in view, he wondered how deep Mrs. Flounder was in the plot to rob Gusta Muller and her little brother of the German fortune.

"I wanted some excuse to get into Mrs. Flounder's house and this will get me there," he said to himself. "I want to see what this woman is like. I overheard her agree to carry out certain plans proposed by Nicholas Nabb and if they are connected with the plot against Gusta, I will know it."

He waited nearly an hour before he left the room and then he went down and turned his face toward Mrs. Flounder's domicile.

The walk across the city was not a very long one and when he rung the bell of the door which would usher him into the strange house, he could not help wondering anew what would come of the adventure.

Mrs. Flounder, smiling and with a bow, invited him in and the door closed upon him.

"I'm inside, anyway," thought Clip. "I have invaded the den of the strange beast and if I am bitten it will be my own fault."

Minerva Flounder conducted the boy ferret into her parlor alongside the hall and left her visitor there.

"In a moment," she said, on retiring. "I will be at leisure then and will delight to entertain you."

Clip looked all around and took in the appointments of the place. He noticed that the furniture was good and nearly new, as if it had been

a late purchase, and while inspecting it the door opened and he turned his head.

"Jehosaphat!" cried the boy detective when he caught sight of the person who came forward, and then he heard a stern voice say:

"That is your chafge, Minerva!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE BUTTERFLY TOUCHES A HEART.

WELL might Clever Clip start at sound of the voice and at sight of the person who had spoken.

At the same time he saw Mrs. Flounder, but he did not look at her.

The man behind her was tall and had a part of his face hidden by a close-fitting mask of black.

His hand was gloved and Clip saw that it covered him like a revolver.

"There is your charge, I say," continued the masked man. "Take good care of him."

In another moment the man had vanished and the boy found himself face to face with the woman.

For a second Clip could hardly realize what had taken place. He seemed to be in a strange dream; everything appeared unreal, and he could not believe that he had been lured to a trap set for him by the very man whom he was watching.

It was not until Minerva Flounder crossed the room and stopping in front of him, looked down into his face and smiled.

"I hope we shall get along very well together," she said. "I will be found kind and clever, but you want to obey me in every way, for in doing so lies your future happiness."

"I must obey you, must I?" cried Clip springing up. "I am in a trap and you are the keeper of it. You are to be my keeper, and if I resist this imprisonment I am to be harshly dealt with. Is that it? What right have you or any one else to hold me thus?"

This did not appear to illustrate the woman in the least.

Instead of smiling as she might have done over the boy's hot language, she came closer and bent forward.

"Don't get excited. There is no one going to hurt you if you act prudently. You are in my house—"

"I know that, and the man who lured me to the trap is Jack Jeffers, as sleek a scamp as ever drew the breath of life."

"I know no names in this transaction. I know no one, I say, and you need not accuse any one."

"But I do!" exclaimed Clip. "I accuse three men, for all are in the dark plot against me and a friend of mine whom they robbed of her fortune."

Mrs. Flounder fell back, still looking at Clip, but did not reply.

"I want to go out of this house. I demand to be released at once and given the liberty that belongs to me."

"Don't go so fast. Don't let your temper get the best of you."

Clever Clip stood before the woman and glanced at the door.

"I am going whether you say so or not," he cried. "Stand back, or I will see that the police know of this and that your name is told at Headquarters and—"

"Go, then!" interrupted Mrs. Flounder. "Open the door and walk out if you don't like my house."

Clip was at the door by this time and the following moment had twisted the knob; but the portal did not open.

He knew then that the house was locked against his escape and turning to the cool-headed woman, he clinched his fists and said in sharp tones:

"So you are the fourth one in the plot against Gusta, are you?"

"Against who?" asked Mrs. Flounder, coming forward as if the name had been a revelation to her.

"Against Gusta Muller, the German girl who never did any one a speck of harm. She has been robbed by a set of scoundrels who ought to be looking out from between iron bars."

"I don't know Gusta Muller," said Mrs. Flounder.

"Then, they did not tell you about their rascality, I guess. They might have been ashamed of the trick, or perhaps they don't trust you very far."

Minerva Flounder waved Clip to a chair while she stood herself, looking down at him.

with an expression which he could not altogether fathom.

"What about this German girl?" she went on. "Who is Gusta Muller?"

"What makes this woman so anxious to know these things?" Clip asked himself. "She seems very anxious to pry into this matter. Never heard of Gusta Muller or little Paul? That's not so very curious, but she wants to know something about them."

The next moment Clip was giving Mrs. Flounder the history of Gusta as he had picked it up from her own lips at different times. He had not very much to tell, for the life of the doll-maker had been of the simplest kind; there was nothing exciting about it, but Mrs. Flounder listened with a good deal of interest and when Clip finished she did not speak for a full minute.

"So that is the story of Gusta Muller, is it?" said she.

"I've told you all I know about the girl," was the reply. "It isn't very much, for girls like Gusta haven't any history. She was robbed by a set of as cool rascals as ever escaped the halter and now they are trying to cover up their crime."

There was no reply.

"Gusta Muller never thought of placing the twenty thousand marks in the old trunk until Jackson Jeffers, as he calls himself, told her to do so," resumed Clip. "Can't you see this plot, Mrs. Flounder?"

"I don't know no Jackson Jeffers," she said.

"I haven't accused you of knowing him, but why am I here? Who are you serving anyhow?"

"Who lured you to my house, for lured hither you say you were?"

"Jack Jeffers himself."

"The man who advised Gusta Muller to hide the fortune in her trunk?"

"The same precious jackal."

Mrs. Minerva Flounder seemed to reflect.

"You serve this rascal and do a German girl great injury when you detain me in this house. You don't want Gusta Muller and her little brother to lose all they have in the world—to be coolly robbed by scamps, do you?"

"I don't like to see people lose honest money that's a fact; but—"

"But you have given your promise to the men in this infernal plot to serve them, and you stand ready to place yourself in the path to Sing Sing by holding to that promise as against the girl and her brother."

"Where do the orphans live?"

Clip hesitated. What, give Gusta's address up to this woman who was in the trio's pay. He did not think it would be right, and therefore refrained.

"You won't tell me, eh? You refuse to let me know where the children live. Well, you can't expect me to treat you very cleverly if you refuse to treat with me."

Mrs. Flounder was leaving the room when the voice of Clip called a halt.

"What are you going to do?" asked the boy ferret as she turned and waited for him to proceed. "Am I to remain in the toils and are you going to put yourself on record as helping to deprive two orphans of their fortune?"

"Never mind what I am going to do. You stay where you are," and with this she swept out of the room and left Clip again to himself.

"I thought I had her at one time," he mused. "I really thought I had touched the heart of this woman, but I guess she hasn't any to be touched. She is hand-in-glove with the conspirators and I am a rat in the trap to be killed when the time comes if they can't get rid of me any other way."

An hour passed before Clip heard any signs of other people besides himself in the house, and then the door opened again and he saw Mrs. Flounder's face at the threshold.

She looked at Clip a moment and then came across the floor, her feet making no noise on the soft carpet and her eyes fastened on the boy ferret's face.

"You told the truth," said Minerva Flounder. "There are just two in the nest. They are nice people and it is a pity to rob them of what belongs to them by inheritance."

What did she mean by such words? Could it be that she was relenting and that she had really seen Gusta and little Paul?

"If you think that way," said Clip, "why don't you help them by unlocking that door and giving me a chance to recover their stolen fortune?"

"What would become of me if I did?"

"Can't you answer that question? Can't you hide from them? You don't have to live in

this house or serve the biggest rascals in New York."

"That's a fact, boy, I don't."

Gusta Muller will fall sick when she realizes that her fortune is lost beyond recovery and who will take care of motherless little Paul?"

"But if the money is gone how can it be recovered?"

"Some of it may be returned by good hard work. It will take work to fasten the crime upon the right parties, but it can be done. You are not very deep in the mire as yet, Mrs. Flounder. You are not so deep in it but that you can pull yourself out without much mud clinging to your shoes. A little more work for these men and there will be no escape for you when the crash comes. Can't you see that?"

The woman hesitated. She stood in the middle of the room like a person halting between two opinions.

Clip's heart stood still in his throat from fear. He dared not move for fear of turning the debating woman against him forever.

"I can't see the children mistreated and robbed in this manner. I don't know anything about the robbery. As I live, I wasn't in that plot! Come, you shall go out. But for heaven's sake don't send the police after me."

"I won't, Mrs. Flounder. I will remember your kindness and will stand between you and the coppers."

Clip was clutched by the burning hand of the woman; he was led to the door and thence into the hallway.

A minute later he stood under the lamps of Gotham.

CHAPTER VII.

FORTUNE NUMBER TWO.

"GREAT CICERO! what's this? Gone? Got a spasm of goodness and left us in the lurch? I don't want to believe it, but this is what this letter says."

Jackson Jeffers, standing in the middle of his room, was looking, staring at a letter which the post had just delivered and he was showing in his face the excitement its reception had occasioned.

"I'll see about this. I'll look into this affair and the sooner the better," he went on. "It was lucky enough to get hold of the old trunk which Nabb, instead of burning at once, sold to an old dealer and now if I can only overhaul this woman who has played us false, I will have scored another hit in this little game of ours and we will begin to feel safe. But what if she has let the boy out? What if she took a streak of sympathy—Pshaw! that woman have such a thing about her? Nonsense!"

Just then the door flew wide and the form of Nicholas Nabb came forward.

"Your model of faithfulness is a pretty pattern to go by," laughed Jack, looking up at the lawyer who seemed to be wondering what had happened to so alter his countenance.

"What's up now?"

The letter was tossed upon the table and Nabb picked it up.

The very first sentence seemed to drive all color from his cheeks.

"I don't believe Minerva has played us false," he said. "I have known her twenty years—"

"But what does the letter say? I feel that I can't go any deeper in this affair and I have concluded to leave the city at once; but I do so with the best wishes for your future. What does that mean if not that she has deserted us? If you can figure it out any other way you will do me a favor."

Nicholas seemed nonplussed and read the letter through, while Jack watched him with a smile at the corners of his mouth.

"Let's go and see," he exclaimed, throwing the letter back upon the table.

Jeffers looked at his watch.

"I've got another engagement and the time is nearly up," he said. "But as I'm anxious to see what this really means, though I think Mrs. Flounder has floundered out of the game, I will go with you to her house."

Nabb stood for a moment longer where he had stopped and a strange look appeared in his eye.

"If the boy is loose it may make bad work," he said at last.

"Oh, we'll have to trap the young fox again, that's all," was the reply.

"That may not be the easiest thing in the world."

"But it will be done," said Jeffers through shut teeth. "I know how to set more than one trap. By the way, Mrs. Flounder never was a woman of much force—"

"I always thought she was."

"Of course. But I never did."

Nicholas Nabb seemed averse to talking about the matter, and was anxious to get away.

They left the room together, and while going down-stairs, the cunning Jeffers said:

"We ought to separate. You go one way to the house and I'll go another. That will be best."

They agreed to do this, and in an instant they were making their advance upon Mrs. Flounder's residence from different directions.

Jeffers was the first to reach it, but there was no response to his ring, and as he walked away he encountered Nabb coming toward the house.

"Go back. The nest is empty," he said.

"The woman has given us the slip, and if she will only remain out of town, she will be doing us a service."

In a little while Nicholas Nabb was back in the office in the Belgium Block, and lighting a gas jet, he sat down at the desk which he occupied when at work, unlocked it.

"What's up?" said a voice behind him, and looking over his shoulder, he saw in the room the form of Nippem, his partner.

"What do you mean?"

"Something's going wrong. You know what you told Jack about the location of the trunk?"

"Yes."

"Well, old Dobby sold it."

In an instant the pen which Nabb had taken up fell from his hand.

"Sold that trunk?" he cried, turning pale.

"You don't mean that, Solon."

"I mean nothing else. I have just come from Dobby's, and he informed me that he had sold a trunk answering that description."

"What a fool I was," said Nabb.

"I thought so all the time."

"Who bought it?"

"I don't know."

"Didn't you ask Dobby?"

"I did, but the old man didn't seem to know. He never takes down the names of his customers, and that is why he didn't know who the buyer was."

Nicholas Nabb shut the desk and looked at his partner a full minute.

He wondered if Nippem knew about Mrs. Flounder's escapade, but he concluded not to worry him with a counter thunderbolt, and therefore did not mention it.

"I'll go back to Jason Sixpence at once," he said at last.

"You don't mean now?"

"Why not? We don't want any German money in our hands at this stage of the game."

"The boy is under lock and key and Minerva will see that he doesn't give us any trouble."

Again Nabb was on the eve of telling Nippem what had really happened, but again he resisted the temptation and did not do so.

"What's this story about the German girl falling heir to another fortune?" Nippem suddenly asked.

Nabb started.

"What other fortune?" he asked.

"What, haven't you heard of it? I learned it by accident and if it is true, then there may be another stake for us three."

Nicholas was all attention at once and wheeled himself around until he fairly faced Nippem whose thin face was lit up with that eagerness and avarice which had been the bane of his dishonest life.

"I ran across Parsons to-day—Parsons the heir-hunter—and he took me into his confidence to some extent. He has learned through some source that a girl named Muller, or Mueller, is heir to a lot of money over in the old country."

"It's the legacy she got, I suspect."

"No, it isn't," persisted Nippem. "It's another one, and from what Parsons said, it is a bigger pull than the one she didn't get," and a sickly smile ran off the speaker's face. "It's a fortune coming to her from her mother's side."

"I don't see how Jack overlooked that if there is anything in the story."

"Neither do I, but I believe Gusta Muller is the person being looked for by Parsons."

"If she is and he finds her—"

"He will rake in the biggest half of the fortune for that is the way he does."

"You're right. I pity the heir that falls into Poke Parsons's hands."

"Look here," and Nippem came closer and looked down into the upturned face of Nicholas Nabb in the office chair. "If we let him find the heir to this second fortune, we ought to be kicked into the street and from there up the river. I'm in favor of taking everything in sight."

"And looking after what isn't in sight, eh?" grinned Nabb. "Well, so am I."

"The girl will know something about her mother's line. She is not so dumb as not to know about that if she does make dolls for a living."

"You mean, I see, that we should get her story from her and compare it with what Parsons told you?"

"That's it exactly."

"Well, which one of us shall make the attempt?"

"Which one of us? Heavens! Jack who knows the girl and who can do anything with her, is just the one for this job."

"But where is Jack?"

"Always on hand when wanted," said a voice at this juncture, and at the door appeared the figure of the very man whose name had been mentioned.

Jack Jeffers came forward, carefully shutting the door behind him, and listened to Nippem's account of his unexpected discovery.

"What do you think?" asked Solon Nippem when he had finished. "Is there anything in this, Jack?"

"Nothing," was the sententious response.

"Be sure there isn't, for if Parsons gets the move on us and captures the heir, he will also capture the legacy."

"I know Poke Parsons," smiled Jeffers. "I know that when he lays his hands on a fortune he takes everything in sight. But really, gentlemen, there isn't anything in this story, or at least the heir isn't our Gusta Muller."

It was not until he stood on the street, a square from the office he had just left, that a singular expression came across Jack Jeffers's face.

"Holy smoke! what a discovery!" he exclaimed. "And to think that Poke Parsons made it! Gusta Muller's mother was a May and this second fortune comes from her brother who went out to Australia twenty years ago. Now I will see what Jack Jeffers can do when he plays a hand all by himself. This is the biggest windfall of them all. I must step in between them and fasten on the new pile like an octopus. I guess I'm equal to the emergency!" and a laugh rippled over the cool-head's lips.

CHAPTER VIII.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER.

THE Battery Ferret had resolved to keep his word with Mrs. Flounder.

She had released him from durance and it was his duty not to betray her to those who would punish her for her part in the game against Gusta Muller.

He was quite sure that Jack Jeffers was the man who really planned the conspiracy, for he was still playing his hand, and if he succeeded the girl would never see a dollar of the lost fortune.

Clip happened to catch sight of the man from over the sea shortly after he emerged from the office of the lawyer sharks with the discovery that Gusta was the rightful claimant to another fortune larger than the one that had been lost with the old trunk.

"Something's the matter with the precious rascal," said the Battery Butterfly as he watched the man a few seconds, seeing that he was disturbed as if some revelation of a startling nature had just been made. "If I'm not mistaken, the three vultures have had a consultation and it still affects Mr. Jack."

When the man moved off Clip followed him down-town until he saw him vanish into the hallway above which were the offices of a number of lawyers and claim-agents.

"I thought so," muttered Clip. "The fellow is up to something and that's why he has brought me to this part of the city."

Sure enough Jack Jeffers was "up to something," for he went to a door which bore a sign "P. Parsons, Claim Agent and Recoverer of Lost Estates."

Into the room beyond he went and remained there nearly an hour. Clip did not desert his post below for he was anxious to see what would finally become of the man who had decoyed him to Mrs. Flounder's domicile.

Jack walked off with agile tread and when he had reached a place some squares from the building he entered his own lodgings and remained in-doors.

Having watched the sharper home, Clip was about to turn away when he was touched on the shoulder, and to his surprise he saw before him a man in plain clothes.

"Hello! Captain Cupid," cried the Battery Butterfly, though his eyes said that he wished he had not encountered the person whom he addressed.

"The very boy I want," said the detective. "Let's drop in here and talk."

Clip was taken to a small eating-house which was quiet enough at that particular hour and when they were seated the handsome detective known as Captain Cupid said:

"What's this about a German girl losing her trunk the other day?"

Clip started. He did not want the detective to know anything about the matter, having promised himself that he would help Gusta find her property besides punishing the rascals without calling in the detective police; but here was his friend, Captain Cupid, one of the shrewdest ferrets of the city, onto the robbery.

Clip tried to evade the question, but the captain was too much for him.

"I guess you know something about it," he said. "I ran across Bunce, the boy who loafed on the Battery, and he put me onto the affair. Come, this is something which ought to be looked into, for if the poor girl's baggage has fallen into the hands of rascals, it ought to be recovered as soon as possible."

"I'm looking after it myself, Captain," said Clip, driven to the wall by the good-natured detective. "I am on the trail now and hope in time to send all concerned in the work up the river."

"You do? Who are they?"

"Now look here, Captain Cupid, you don't want to rob me of a little glory, do you?"

"Not for the world would I do that, Clip, my boy."

"What is it, then?"

"I would like to know something about the suspected parties so as to be able to help you on short notice should you ever need my services."

Knowing Cupid for a fair-minded man and a detective of his word, Clever Clip told all he knew about the theft of Gusta Muller's trunk and when he had concluded the detective shook his head.

"You've got a job on hand sure enough. If you are going to fight such a lot of scamps you will have to look out, for the man called Jeffers is no common rascal. He was once on trial for his life, but got off through some flaw in the evidence; but that hasn't deterred him, I see. He is called Jack, the Silk-handed."

"Why silk-handed?"

"Because the person whom he was tried for killing was strangled to death and the deed was done so sleekly that no trace of it remained, or at least, not enough to hang the man who did the deed."

"But do you think Jack did it?"

"There is scarcely a doubt of it," was the reply. "As I have said, he is a cool-headed rascal who can turn his hand to anything, and when he was tried for his life one of the lawyers was Nicholas Nabb."

Clip gave a long whistle.

"That accounts for the milk in the cocoanut," he cried. "I see the chord that unites the men. It is no wonder that they are together in this matter."

Half an hour later, thinking of the information concerning Jack Jeffers's past, which he had picked up through his accidental meeting with Captain Cupid, Clip was again on the street, this time watched, though he knew it not, by as keen a pair of eyes as there were in Gotham.

These eyes shone in Jack's head and when the boy entered his own abode the man stood for a little time on the sidewalk and watched the house.

"That proves it. Mrs. Flounder was won over by the young rascal, and let him out of the trap. I must attend to this business at once, for if I let it go on he might slip up on us and spoil matters. The information I squeezed out of Parsons—it was like getting blood out of a turnip—will do us a vast amount of good, and I will see that it is utilized."

The man hovered in the vicinity like a vulture and when the Battery Butterfly came out of his lodgings he was again followed by the man who in the mean time had disguised himself with a false beard which so altered his usual looks that the sharp eyes of the boy would not have recognized him.

Jack Jeffers was a man as slick as the slickest scoundrel and was playing a game which involved more than a mere amount of money. His own freedom was at stake, for he knew that if he was arrested for helping to defraud Gusta Muller out of her fortune, he would stand in the shadow of a prison.

All at once Jack stopped and watched a

man who, coming toward him, attracted his attention and held him spellbound, as it were.

"I want you," said this person in a voice which Jeffers seemed to recognize.

In another moment he turned about and was walking off with the speaker.

"Do you know what has happened?" asked the man who had led him to the back room of a saloon where they sat at one of the round tables.

"Not exactly. What's happened?"

"Why, the trunk's disappeared from Dobby's," was the reply. "You know Nicholas, instead of burning it, took it there, but the old man's gone and sold it to some unknown person."

A singular look came into Jack Jeffers's eyes. The man before him was Solon Nippem, the partner of Nicholas Nabb, and he, too, had put on a disguise, as if afraid to come to that part of the city in his true colors.

"Well, what makes that old trunk trouble you?" queried Jack.

"Don't you see, the police might get hold of both the story and the trunk. They might trace it back to Nabb, and that would get the whole firm into trouble."

"The trunk's all right," said Jeffers, with a grin. "It's all right, I say."

"But I want to know that it is. I don't like to feel that it might fall into the hands of the—"

"It won't; it won't, I say."

"But—"

"Hang it all, Nippem, I'm the man who bought the trunk of old Dobby."

"You?" cried the lawyer, falling back in utter astonishment.

"Why not? Do you suppose that I would let that thing rise up against us one of these days?"

"I hardly thought you would, Jack, but, you see, I didn't know just what might happen—"

"What we want now is to look after any one who may be looking after the girl's interests in the way of bringing to light the true loss of the baggage."

"Who's doing that?"

"I understand that a boy is 'on the trail,' as they say."

"A boy? Not the one Nicholas showed you from the window of the office?"

"The same one."

"We must attend to the young ferret. Do you know him by sight?"

"I think I do," and the speaker recalled the boy he had just tracked home after luring him to Mrs. Flounder's house. "I know him by sight, and have a slight acquaintance with him besides. I will see that he is thrown from the scent, and that we are not followed by anybody."

"By Jove! you're a good one," cried Nippem.

"Now, if this other story—the one about the second fortune—was true, we would get another pull at the girl's purse-strings."

"But it's a hoax, depend on that," said Jack, and when they went out he looked at Nippem and smiled to himself, for he knew more than he dared tell his partner in the diabolical plot against the Mullers.

Some distance from the place of conference they separated, and in a few minutes the man from over-sea was looking over some papers which he took from a hole in the wall of a little room in his own abode.

"These papers settle the whole matter!" he said at last.

CHAPTER IX.

CLIP FINDS AN EMPTY NEST.

THE next day near nightfall the Battery Ferret, finding himself in the neighborhood of Gusta's home, resolved to call and see how the two orphans were coming on. Besides, he had something to tell Gusta, for he believed that he was on the right trail which would eventually lead him to the stolen fortune, and, then, by accident, he had discovered that Parsons, the claim lawyer, had advertised for the heir of a German fortune.

"The lawyer spells the name Mueller which is not quite the way Gusta spells hers," he said to himself as he neared the house. "I don't know that there is anything in this new windfall for Gusta and little Paul; but I'll ask her about it and she may know the Muellers who should have the legacy."

When he had climbed to the door which opened into the house of the doll-maker and her brother, he was startled by the silence that prevailed there.

When he knocked and had waited a minute

without receiving any response he looked alarmed and then took hold of the knob. But the door was locked and did not yield.

"There's something wrong here," said Clever Clip. "They were here yesterday for I saw little Paul's face at the window, but here everything is locked up and I can't get any reply to my raps. I don't like the situation. It looks bad."

He was about to quit the spot and inquire below when he heard footsteps behind him and a woman came into view.

"They're gone," said this person, looking at Clip.

"What, Gusta and Paul gone?"

"Yes, they went off this afternoon with a gentleman who called in the morning."

"Did they move their effects?"

"They took everything, dolls and all," smiled the woman.

Clip seemed stunned. He looked at the closed door and then at the woman in the hall.

"Would you let me into the old room? Have you the key?" he asked at last.

In reply she took a key from under her apron and opened the door. Clip stepped across the threshold and looked about him.

The home of the orphans was desolate enough. Not a particle of furniture remained. It was a perfect clean-out and while he stood there, taking in his surroundings, he could not but wonder what had brought about this sudden change.

"She always told me that she was comfortably situated and wouldn't quit the old place," he said at last. "I don't see what made her go off. And without notifying me, either."

Then he turned to the door where the woman stood waiting for him.

"What sort of man was it who called?" he asked.

In few words she gave him a word photograph of the man.

"It was Jack Jeffers!" said Clip. "It was that scamp of scamps and he is playing a new game and the two are now in his power."

"They seemed to go with him willingly," said she. "I can't say so much for Gusta as for little Paul, the brother she brought back from the old country with her."

"Gusta seemed to hesitate, did she?"

"She seemed to dread to go away from the old place."

"But she went without telling you where she was going or why she left?"

"That is it exactly. She never said a word to me only when she handed me the keys. Then she said that she thought it best to move right off and away they went."

Clever Clip, the young ferret, stood silent in the middle of Gusta's room.

"I wonder if she wrote Martin about the change? No, if she would not leave any word for me it isn't likely that she wrote her friend of it. There is a bit of ugly work in this thing, and I don't like it at all."

"Do you think there was anything dark about the removal?" asked the old woman, who seemed an honest creature and who thought a good deal of the little doll-maker.

"I think there is a piece of rascality at the bottom of it," said Clip. "I think you are honest enough to keep this to yourself and that you had nothing to do with the man's game. He enticed Gusta and Paul away for a purpose, but from this time on he will have a shadow at his heels and I will show the whole gang that it takes more than three human jackals to rob and wrong Gusta and Paul."

Clip was about to quit the spot when the hand of the woman fell upon his arm.

"One minute. I was in the room a moment while they were packing up. The wagon was below waiting for them and the man who came for her was watching everything with the eye of a lynx. I saw the little boy go over into yon corner and appear to write on the wall."

Clip hurried across the room with the woman at his heels and the next moment he exclaimed:

"There is some scrawling there, but I can't read it."

"It is German writing," was the reply. "You know the boy can't speak English and what he wrote would naturally be in his own tongue. Paul is very bright for a boy of his years and—"

"Can't you read German?" interrupted the Battery Butterfly. "I want to know what Paul left behind. Maybe it is a tracer."

Instead of answering him, the woman left the room and soon returned accompanied by a German woman who lived in the same house.

Clip held his breath while this latter person leaned toward the wall and read what little Paul had left there.

"It's not very much," said the reader in English, as she turned to Clever Clip. "It says that they have gone off with the kind-hearted man from Germany and he bids good-by to the old house."

"That is something," exclaimed Clip, with a sudden glance at the janitress.

"I hope it will turn out to be a good deal," was the reply. "If you really wish to find them I hope that writing will lead you to the pair."

The Battery Ferret went down to the street once more.

In the mean time the lamps had been lighted and he saw that once more the shades of night had fallen over the metropolis.

"It's a bold stroke for a fortune. It's a deep play for something greater and more precious than gold," he muttered. "I am quite sure that Jack Jeffers is now playing a hand separate from the one being played by the three, and if he isn't tripped up, good-by forever to the happiness of Gusta and little Paul."

Clip hardly knew where to go. The trail was lost again, though he knew that the two orphans had been lured from their home for a purpose by Jackson Jeffers, the man who had worked the deceptive game across the sea. He stood for some time on the sidewalk with the sea of humanity ebbing and flowing around him, and when he finally started off it was with a poorly defined purpose, for the events of the last few minutes had affected him strangely and almost stunned him.

He felt that it would be next to impossible to trace the owner of the wagon which had removed Gusta Muller's few effects. There were hundreds of such people in the city and it would be like looking for a needle in a haystack to try to find the right one.

"Why didn't I ask the janitress what the man looked like?" he exclaimed. "She certainly saw the driver of the wagon and could have given me a clue."

But he did not go back to the house, but kept on and stopped at last in front of a police station frequented by the private detectives of the city.

"I can find Captain Cupid by going in there," said Clip, looking at the building. "He almost made me promise that when this matter got too mysterious for me I would call on him for aid. Shall I do it? Shall I go in and get Captain Cupid to help me out of the middle? He is the best tracker in the city and will do anything for me. No, I won't."

Clip turned suddenly on his heel and started off. He walked fast as if afraid that if he hesitated he would change his mind and go back to Captain Cupid, and he was resolved not to do this under any circumstances.

"Here I am; how what shall I do next?"

Clip had reached a certain part of the city and turning down a narrow street he knocked at a door which was opened and he glided into the dark hall beyond.

"I got your letter and I am glad that you are not going to run off," he said, looking at the woman, who held a lamp in her hand which she had picked up from a table in the room to which the Battery Butterfly had been conducted.

"I thought you would come," she said. "But don't let's stay in this room; it's next to the street and there's no telling who may come to the window."

The speaker was the famous Mrs. Flounder and she had informed Clip by post of her new whereabouts.

"The little German family has vanished," said Clip.

"What, gone from the old house on C—street?"

"Yes; Jackson Jeffers enticed them off and that, you know, is the new play in the game."

For a moment Mrs. Flounder was silent, then she clinched her hand and leaning toward the table struck it with her fist.

"The rascals are determined to win, aren't they?" she exclaimed. "I get madder and madder the more I think of how they wanted to drag me into the mud. I've been hiding here ever since I let you out of my house and if they discover me, why, they will try to fasten the clamps on me in some manner. But, Clip, they ought to be sent up, every one of them."

"They're going up, never fear," was the boy's quick reply. "They will see the inside of Sing Sing if nothing worse, and I intend to see that the fortune, or a part of it, comes back to Gusta and little Paul."

"I wish I could help you by going out on the trail myself."

"I don't want you to. You are helping me now, Mrs. Flounder, and when the end comes

you will be in shape to put the final clamps on the sweet-scented trio."

Minerva Flounder smiled and with a laugh assured Clever Clip that nothing would suit her better.

CHAPTER X.

CLIP IN A TRAP.

THE Battery Ferret now determined to see what had become of the Mullers since he was sure that they had been enticed from the old home by Jack Jeffers who appeared to be playing a cool and clever hand of his own unbeknown to the other men in the plot, Nabb and Nippem.

He did not have to be told that he was dealing with a man who would not stop at anything to clear his way and win the toss.

Captain Cupid's information was to the effect that once upon a time this same Jack Jeffers had been on trial for his life and that while he had escaped the clutches of the law the general belief was that he was guilty of the dark crime of murder.

This was enough to put him doubly on his guard, and when he turned to the task of ferreting out Gusta Muller's whereabouts, it was with everything before him and with a great deal of caution.

Martin May, the young barge secretary who was regarded as being the German girl's accepted lover, had secured a position in Philadelphia and was, as yet, ignorant of what had happened in New York, as Gusta had refrained from writing him concerning her loss, saying to Clip that she did not like to acknowledge to Martin that she had foolishly lost her fortune. Therefore, Martin had not heard of the series of misfortunes that had befallen Gusta and little Paul, though Clip felt that he could not be kept in the dark much longer.

When the Battery Butterfly left the house inhabited by Mrs. Flounder, he had made up his mind to turn over every stone in his search for the Mullers.

Not long thereafter he turned up in that part of the city inhabited by Jack Jeffers, and while he was watching the house where the man had lodgings, he saw the very fellow come out of the place and walk away.

Hoping that Jack would lead him to the new nest, he started after him and tracked him, not to a spot where it was likely the lost were hidden, but to the Bowery, where he dodged suddenly into a building known to Clip as the place of business of a man who did not follow a very likely calling, as he bought a good many stolen goods.

For some time he watched Jack at the counter, and when some money seemed to pass over it toward the sleek rascal, Clever Clip fell back and saw him come out.

There was a satisfied grin on Jack's face, and when he started off again he, of course, had Clip at his heels.

Jack suddenly turned into a very narrow thoroughfare, so narrow, in fact, that it was little better than an alley, and thinking that he intended to dive into some house in the dark place, our young ferret plunged after him.

All at once a hand fell on Clip's wrist like a steel bracelet, and when he fell back and looked up he discovered that he had been caught by the very man he had been tracking.

"Just as I thought!" laughed Jack, showing his face in the uncertain light that prevailed. "I thought I heard a hound on my track, and I wasn't mistaken, eh?"

"Just as you think," said the boy, giving him a fearless look for the one which had just been bestowed upon him. "Just as you think, Mr. Jack Jeffers."

"You've been watching me all evening, haven't you?"

Clip did not reply.

"Never mind: you can hold your tongue if you want to, but it won't do you any good in the long run. By the way, as you want to see all you can of me, I will take you to a place where you will be accommodated."

Having said this he pulled Clip after him, and continued down the alley, his hand seeming to sink into the boy's wrist, and his eyes to look him through.

Clever Clip felt that he had been caught, and that he had fallen into the hands of the head of the game against Gusta and little Paul.

He did not try to break from Jack's grasp, for the hand that held him told how futile would be any such attempts, and shutting his teeth, he went after the man, even anxious to see what was to be the outcome of the villain's catch.

They had nearly reached the other mouth of the alley when Jack turned to a house and unlocked the door. He drew Clip across the threshold, and shut the door behind him, the lock clicking ominously as it swung to.

Clip was taken into a room of limited area and a very high ceiling as he saw by the jet which Jack turned on without releasing him.

"It was like catching a moth that comes to the light," smiled Jack, falling back and looking at the boy who had been pushed toward a chair which he did not take, but stood erect beside it and looked cool and even defiant.

"I didn't expect to meet with success so soon," continued the man. "Truth to tell, boy, you have been playing a nice game all along and we have to put you out of our road."

"Do you think that will keep the road clear?" cried Clip.

"We'll see to the rest," was the quiet response.

"Do you expect to win this game against the happiness of the Mullers?"

"Never mind the Mullers," exclaimed Jack with a laugh. "I don't see why you take such an interest in them; you ain't the girl's sweetheart. You're not the boy she likes."

"I know that. I lay no claims to Gusta Muller's heart. I am her friend, though, and when her trunk comes, I am not the person to steal it."

The man burst into a loud guffaw which gave the boy a true insight to his real nature.

"What is more, I didn't go over to Germany to swindle her by getting her to place her money in the lining of the family trunk and then—"

Clip paused for the man had sprung toward him with the flaming eyes of the tiger and seemed ready to fall upon him and tear him to pieces.

"Go on, you little scamp. Proceed and finish your sentence, you little gutter-snipe. I want to know what opinion you have of me."

"It's a very poor one," said the boy, who had laid hold of the back of the chair for the purpose of defending himself against the encroachments of the scoundrel. "I say I haven't any opinion so to speak of a man who would plot to rob a poor girl of all she has in this world and make her toil till late in the night making dolls at so much a dozen."

"Ho! ho! you don't seem to like me, that's a fact," grinned Jack Jeffers. "Well, the feeling is reciprocated. I don't think the world of a gutter-snipe who will turn on a man and track him from pillar to post like a hound."

Clip did not reply.

"You got out of Mother Flounder's house. Did you win the old lady over with the sympathy racket? Did you melt the heart that never melted before and coax her to let you out of durance?"

"Mrs. Flounder was deceived by you plotters and when she saw things in the right light, she did what was right."

"That is, she let you out, eh?"

"I got out, never mind now." Jack went back and for a moment looked at Clip with the ferocity of a wild beast, then he suddenly moved toward him and covering him with his finger, said madly:

"This isn't Mother Flounder's shanty, as you will learn. This is quite another trap and one that is capable of holding everything it catches. No matter what the size of the rat is, it holds them all, Norway and field rat."

Jack gained the door and with his hand on the knob looked at the boy still at the chair.

"You will stay here," he went on. "If you can play the sympathy dodge in this house and get out you are welcome to do so, but the chances are that the game won't win here."

"You mean, miserable scoundrel, don't you know that you are playing a hand which will, in time, fail to rake in the stakes? You may succeed in robbing Gusta and little Paul of their money, but the hands of Justice will grip you in the near future and some day every mother's son of you will pay for the crime you have committed. You once escaped with your life simply because the law had a loophole or two; but every one who knew anything about the case believed that you were guilty."

Something like a half-suppressed roar fell from Jack's lips and he left the door, coming forward again with his eyes on fire.

"What do you mean?" he almost shrieked.

"I was telling the truth, that's all," said the undaunted boy. "I was saying that, although they cleared you before, you were guilty, and some day the old crime will come home to roost."

"You can't frighten me into letting you out of the trap, no, no," said Jack. "I know my business. By Jupiter! I've a notion to choke you anyhow."

The Battery Ferret straightened, and as the

figure of the rascal came nearer he suddenly grasped the chair and raised it above his head.

"Try it!" he said. "Try it, Jack Jeffers, and if you do I will defend myself to the last extremity."

For a moment the man seemed on the eve of throwing himself upon Clever Clip, but all at once he went toward the door again and let the Battery Butterfly go untouched.

He seemed to fear to go too far even with Clever Clip notwithstanding the difference in years and sizes, and when he reached the door again he looked hastily overhead and growled something about a skeleton in the room, then opened the portal and vanished.

"Caught said Clip when he found himself alone. "Captured by the very man I did not want to let get hold of me. Well, I've got to take things as they come. Maybe if I had posted Captain Cupid I would not be here now. But this is crying over spilled milk and I won't do that."

He heard Jack's steps for a little while, then all was still and he had room and silence to himself.

He was in a dreadful trap and escape seemed impossible.

The more he thought of it the more the situation sunk into his heart; but brave boy that he was, he did not despair.

CHAPTER XI.

A VILLAIN'S BOLD CARD.

"WHY don't Clip come, Gusta?"

This question came from little Paul Muller as he turned disconsolately from the window of the new lodgings and faced his sister who was finishing the head of a doll.

"I'm quite sure he will be here before long, Paul. You know I wrote him and gave the letter to Mr. Jeffers who said he would deliver it and that he would tell Clip where we were. Yes, he will come soon. I want to see him and tell him how Mr. Jeffers is trying to find the trunk we lost at the landing."

The orphans were living in a room somewhat larger than the one they had left and in a different part of the city.

Paul, a bright boy, had formed an attachment for Clever Clip and had gone so far as to predict that in time he would think as much of him as he did of Mr. Jeffers.

Gusta went back to her dolls and after awhile footsteps came down the hall beyond the door and the door itself opened.

In came Jack Jeffers himself, looking as sleek as ever.

"Where is Clip and when is he coming to see us again?" cried Paul, the moment he caught sight of the villain.

"Oh, he'll drop in soon!" was the reply.

"To-morrow?"

"To-morrow, I expect."

Little Paul clapped his hands delighted.

At that very moment Clever Clip was the tenant of the trap and the oily sharp knew it.

Jack came forward and for a moment looked over Gusta's shoulders while she worked.

"You haven't found the trunk yet?" tremulously said the German girl.

"Not quite, but what if I am on the track of something better than that old trunk?"

Gusta stopped and looked up at him.

"I don't know what it could be," she answered him.

"Wasn't your mother a May, Gusta?"

"Yes, Wilhelmina May," was the eager reply, and running to a little box at the head of her couch, she brought to the rascal an old-fashioned portrait of a good-looking German matron.

Jack took the picture and looked at it for a moment. He saw that Gusta's face resembled the one photographed before him and when he handed it back to her, he asked:

"Whatever became of her brothers?"

"She only had the one, the uncle who went to Australia and died there long ago. He thought to make his fortune, but we never heard of him and of course he died poor in that strange and far-off land."

"You don't know that he died poor, do you, Gusta?"

"It is true we never heard that he died there, but as we never heard from him at all, the inference is that he perished there in a state of need."

Jack was silent for a moment.

"Look here, Gusta, you're a likely girl and you ought not to waste your life making dolls in this house."

"It's as much for Paul as for myself," was the prompt response. "I could make a liv-

ing at other trades and perhaps marry well some of these days; but you see we have lost the trunk and all it held and have to do something. Besides, doll-making is not disgraceful and, then, I like it, for what I make pleases the little Americans and that gives me pleasure."

Paul had gone to the front window to watch the sights in the street below and Jack lowered his voice as he bent over the flaxen curls of the pretty German girl.

"Look here, Gusta; there may be a double fortune in this thing," he went on. "If you could find a good husband and a second fortune all at the same time wouldn't you think the matter over?"

A sudden flush suffused Gusta Muller's face and she glanced toward Paul.

"I—I don't hardly understand you," she said.

"What if a likely fellow who thinks a good deal of you should offer his heart and hand and at the same time put you on the way to a fortune larger than the one you placed in the old trunk, wouldn't you jump at the chance?"

For the first time Gusta Muller seemed to see rascality in the man who all along had pretended to befriend her.

She fell back from the table and dropping the doll looked him in the eye, her bosom heaving with poorly suppressed excitement and her lustrous eyes aglow.

"Are you speaking for yourself now?" she asked. "Do you mean that if you were to offer me your hand would I accept it?"

The question was pointed and seemed to hit Jack squarely in the face.

"Yes," he said, seizing Gusta's wrist and preventing her from breaking away. "I am telling the truth. There is another fortune, but you can't lay your hands upon it without my help, and things are shaped so that the woman who wins it must become my wife."

These lying words seemed to stun the dollmaker. She looked at Jeffers like a person in a maze and for a moment appeared ready to sink with fright at his feet.

"I can't. You must not ask me in any way to desert Paul," she said. "He is the charge father gave to my keeping just before he died and I will not do anything that will tear us apart—not for all the fortunes in the wide world."

"Oh, that can be fixed. Paul needn't be torn from you. I will see that you have him always with you, Gusta. I want to see you in possession of the new fortune and if I don't get it for you, you will never find it at all."

There was no reply and Gusta heard Paul cry out that a fight was going on in the street.

"I tell you that, while you have been a friend to us, I can't think of your proposition," said the candid German girl. "I must not for Martin's sake."

"Who's Martin?" demanded the ruffian.

"You don't know him; that's a fact. Martin is in Philadelphia where he is employed and I have never written him anything about the loss of the trunk and the bills."

"Oh, is he the young man who used to be in the barge-office here?"

"Yes, the same Martin," blushed Gusta.

"Well, all I have to say is that if you prefer him to the fortune and the hand of Jack Jeffers you ought to be accommodated; but you don't know what you are throwing away."

"I can't break my promise to Martin."

"Has it gone so far as a promise?" grated the maddened rascal.

"Martin and I will be married before long."

The villain laughed in spite of himself. There was to him something funny in the candor of the German girl, and when he looked down into the big brown eyes he must have seen that their owner was very proud of "Martin."

"But look here," he went on. "You must do this thing. You can't lay your hand on a penny of the second fortune without marrying me and I will make you just as good a husband as ever Martin will."

"That may all be, Mr. Jeffers, but the promise! the promise!"

"That's nothing," said the man. "That can be broken for your own good sense ought to tell you that a husband who brings you a fortune isn't to be picked up every day."

Little Paul came from the window and seeming to divine the true state of affairs by looking up into Gusta's face, called upon her in German not to cross Mr. Jeffers; but to do what he said.

"You don't know what this man wants me to do," said Gusta to Paul in the language of the fatherland. "You must not tell me to do this, Paul dear."

"Then, do what you think is best, Gusta. I wish Clip would come," and the boy fell back again while Jeffers wondered what had passed between the pair.

"What are you going to do?" he asked. "What if you see some one else come between you and the new fortune?"

"I can't help that."

"All because you think you ought not to break the promise made to this young jackanapes in Philadelphia!"

In an instant Jack Jeffers saw that he had been too hasty with his tongue.

In an instant Gusta Muller broke from his grasp and pointing toward the door while her face grew red, she ordered him in loud tones to leave the room.

"Go!" she cried. "I believe, after all, you may be the sort of person Clip seems to think you are. You can't come to my home and insult Martin in my presence. You have befriended us, Mr. Jack Jeffers; but you carry your friendship too far. We don't want the other fortune if it has to be gained in the manner you intimate. I would rather make dolls all my life."

The tall figure of the sharper stood near the door and a look of villainy seemed to make his eyes dance.

"You'll wish you had not taken the bit in your teeth," he said with his cold, hard voice in which there was a hidden meaning. "You will yet regret this display of temper, and the time will come when you will stand at the altar with the only man who can get this fortune for you."

Gusta took a hasty step toward him.

"It will never come! Paul and I will make our living, for I will teach him how to paint the doll's faces and we can go back to the old house and outlive the sorrow caused by the loss of the trunk."

"I would like to see you get along if I stand in your way," was the answer. "I can make beggars of both of you and unless you think over what you have just said and take me and the new fortune, both of you will be at the very last round of the ladder of poverty and that before long."

Then the door opened and closed and Gusta fell in a heap in a chair, and little Paul ran to her with a piercing cry of distress and sympathy.

"I'll stand by you Gusta. I'm here yet!" he said, kissing her.

CHAPTER XII.

NICHOLAS NABB MAKES A BARGAIN.

It was very evident that Jack Jeffers was playing a hand of his own independent of the one started by the trio for the fortune which belonged to the Muller children.

The crafty and merciless wretch, as cool a rascal as ever had a dark game in hand, had determined to get Gusta Muller fully in his snare so as to get hold of the second legacy, and to do this effectually he had resolved to make her his wife and thus cheat the young barge-secretary out of a helpmeet.

When he went from the girl's room with the threat on his tongue there was a smile on his face and victory in his eye.

He thought that when Gusta came to her senses she would quietly submit and that he would not have to make beggars of the brother and sister in order to "bring her to her mutton" as he expressed it with a laugh.

Some time elapsed before Gusta revived enough to recognize little Paul and then her arms went round her brother and she drew him close to her side.

"I have found that man out at last, Paul," she said in low tones. "I know now that Jack Jeffers is a thorough-paced rascal and that he means us harm. What was that he said about a new fortune? I almost forgot what it was for my head was in a whirl and I can't remember what took place before he went off."

"I wish Clip would come," said the German boy. "He stays away a long time and Mr. Jeffers said he would take the letter you wrote to him; but now I don't believe Clip ever saw it."

"Perhaps not, Paul. There is no telling what that man will do."

Gusta thought for a moment and then arose and went to the window.

She stood there some time, silently watched by Paul, and when she turned away she went to the table where she had been making dolls and silently resumed work.

Far from the house occupied by the two in peril stood a boy who for hours had tried to find a way out of the room.

It was Clever Clip and he was still an inmate of the chamber where he had been left by Jackson Jeffers who had shrewdly captured him in the alley.

No one had come to him and he was still in ignorance as to where he was, or whether he was the sole tenant of the old place.

Jeffers had left him with a cool threat which told him in very few words that the trap in which he now was was not to open to him again.

He had worked on the feelings of Mrs. Flounder, but here was no one to work on, and he was as lost to the world as if the sidewalk of Gotham had opened and swallowed him.

If the boy could have regained his liberty and reached the streets again he might have run across a man who flitted through the shadows thrown by the lamps and who seemed eager to gain a certain place without being observed.

This man was our old acquaintance, Nicholas Nabb, of the firm of Nabb & Nippem, and he had put on a false beard so as to disguise him from too prying eyes.

He reached at last a large block of buildings which he entered and, finding his way up the stairs that met his gaze, he opened a door and stepped into a small office occupied at the time by a little man writing at a desk in one corner.

Nicholas Nabb astonished the man at the desk for when he came forward the person in the corner looked up and seemed to look the lawyer through.

"My name is Verity—Vincent Verity," said Nabb disguising his voice. "I think I have some information for you providing we can make a bargain mutually agreeable."

"That's good," said the other who was "Poke" Parsons, the man who made a business of hunting up lost heirs and finding lost legacies for them.

Nabb took a long breath and crossed his long legs.

"You have advertised for one or two heirs named Muller or Mueller—you seem in doubt as to the spelling."

"Yes, yes: but that makes little difference. What do you know about them?"

"A good deal perhaps, or nothing at all, as the case may be," said Nabb shrewdly.

"You mean that everything depends on what there is in the matter for you?"

"That's it, exactly."

Parsons leaned back in his chair and seemed to study the situation.

"There is something in the case for the man who helps me," he said at last. "There is nothing in it for the man who tries to win the game himself. Understand?"

Nabb thought he did; he was no chump, and was quite sure he saw through the meaning of the lawyer's words, and when Parsons had finished Nicholas said in his oily voice:

"It might as well be a bargain. How much is coming to the Mueller children?"

"Children, eh? Be there more than one?"

"There are two of them—boy and girl."

"Jehosaphat!" cried Parsons. "Two? Two can't be handled with the ease of one, but we might succeed with them. Look here, Mr. Nabb, you might as well take off that beard. It seems to disturb you; besides, everything is strictly confidential here."

Nabb blushed to the top of his forehead, and removed the false beard, for Parsons, who knew him well, had fathomed the mask and none was necessary in that particular office.

"The whole legacy amounts in our money to about fifty thousand. I can get out of it, as you understand, only my fee in such cases; but I might make it interesting for you if you could put me on the track of the rightful heirs."

"I can. I know where they are now."

"In this city?" cried the impatient Parsons.

"I have not said so; but I want to know what shape the legacy is in."

Poke Parsons thought a moment before he answered Nicholas Nabb. He seemed suspicious of the man who had sneaked to his office disguised, and well he might be, for Nicholas Nabb had a reputation for rascality not surpassed by any member of the profession.

But after awhile Parsons went on and told a nice story, which Nabb seemed to take down with avidity, and when it was finished the heir-finder thought he had succeeded in deceiving the best deceiver in the city.

"It's a go, then!" said Nicholas, rising. "It is understood that I am to name my price for assistance rendered, and get it?"

Poke Parsons nodded.

"I will see that the Mullers are placed in your hands before to-morrow night."

"See that you are not watched," said the lawyer. "We heir-finders are constantly shad-

owed, and there are some people who live on information which really belongs to us and to no one else."

Nicholas Nabb promised faithfully that he would keep the secret, and in less than a minute he was on the street, and on his way to the place where he had last seen Gusta Muller.

He knew nothing of the removal of the children by the artful Jeffers and when he discovered as he suddenly did that the home of the doll-maker contained a tenant who knew nothing of its former occupant he was thunderstruck and stood on the threshold like a man roused suddenly from a dream.

"What's this?" said Nicholas, in a dazed manner. "What does this mean anyway? The Mullers gone away and no one knows what became of them? I don't quite understand."

Watching him when he came back to the street, was a man who had a pair of keen eyes in his head, and when the legal shark moved off he had this person at his heels.

"What are you up to now?" said the man after Nicholas. "You are trying to work a game independent of the one we are into. You oily rascal, Nicholas Nabb, I am going to see you to the end of this adventure and if you are trying to interfere in the little play I have in hand you will wish you had never heard of the German fortune."

Nabb led his tracker, who was Jack Jeffers, down many streets before he showed signs of giving up the trip.

Jeffers did not lose sight of him for a moment and when he saw the lawyer at last turn into the hall leading to the old office, he stopped with a light laugh.

Nicholas went up and struck a light.

He slipped across the room to the desk he occupied and was in the act of opening it when he heard footsteps on the floor.

"You've been out to-night?" said Jeffers, halting in front of the man, who had recognized and was looking at him with astonishment written on his face which was nearly white.

"How do you know? Have you been tracking me?"

The face of Jack Jeffers came closer to the man in the revolving chair and his hands seemed to clinch.

"Never mind what I've been doing. I know my business and you have been working a lay of your own."

Their eyes met and Nicholas Nabb turned to the desk and laid his hand on the lid.

"Hold!" cried Jeffers, darting at the hand and closing on the wrist like a swooping vulture. "I guess you are trying to play a hand independent of mine. You have sold us out to Parsons; you have told him all you know about the Mullers."

"What if I have?"

The reply was a quick spring at Nabb's throat, and the two men went to the floor together.

Five minutes later a man sneaked from the room and went down the half-lighted stair, but he had left behind a new mystery for the police of the great city.

And the moment he reached the sidewalk he seemed to vanish and that was the last of him.

CHAPTER XIII.

CLIP'S RACE FOR LIFE.

BRIGHT and early the next morning Solon Nippem, of Nabb & Nippem, opened the door of the little office in the Belgium Block and fell back with white face and a cry of horror from the sight that met his gaze.

Nicholas Nabb sat in his chair with his face staring at the white wall, and the moment Nippem stopped beside his partner that moment he knew that he was in the presence of the dead!

The alarm was given and the coroner and the doctors who came at the alarm, said that Nicholas Nabb had been choked to death; so the police knew that a new mystery had been given them by the night just passed.

A search of the office revealed the fact that few if any papers belonging to the firm had been disturbed and this deepened the mystery of the lawyer's death.

The body was finally taken away and the detectives of the city began to attack the puzzle of the crime.

Gusta Muller and little Paul heard nothing of all this. They did not know that the hand of death had smitten the villain who had despoiled them of the old trunk, nor that the shadow of peril was deepening about them through the machinations of one dangerous and wholly detestable man.

The morning waned and the Mullers, shut up in their new quarters which they owed to Jack Jeffers, wondered why Clever Clip did not come.

Little Paul had been many times to the window on the lookout for the Battery Butterfly, but the boy did not put in an appearance and Gusta's fingers fell from the work she was forced to do to keep her place in the good graces of the house for which she toiled at doll-making.

Let us go back to the boy we left in the unknown house by Jack Jeffers playing a hand of his own for the new fortune which he knew belonged to the Mullers.

The boy had passed a sleepless night and when he saw the gray light of another day streaming into the room he wondered if its waning was to witness his escape from the place.

As yet no sound had reached his ears telling him that the old house was inhabited by others than himself, and the more he listened the more he became convinced that he was the only tenant it had.

But all at once a door opened and shut somewhere and Clever Clip springing across the room with the nimbleness of a cat waited for the person who had made the noise to enter his prison.

He was quite sure he heard footsteps in the adjoining room and while he watched the door he thought they approached the portal.

"It might be my breakfast," thought the boy detective. "I would like a snack from Delmonico's, that's a fact; but the chances are that my order won't be filled."

He heard a key turn in a lock and the following moment he caught sight of a human face.

"I've fetched you your breakfast," said the person who came in with a tray in his hand.

Clip looked at the speaker and saw that he was little more than an overgrown boy.

As the fellow finished he locked the door behind him and placed what he had brought on the single chair in the place, then crept back, all the time keeping his eye on Clip like a suspicious tiger.

The Battery Butterfly looked at him and seemed to size him up.

The youth was very stout and had the physique of a young giant. He showed a good deal of agility as Clip could see by his movements and when he reached the door he looked at the imprisoned boy and said:

"It ain't as good as you'd get elsewhere in the city, but it's a pretty good snack. There's pertaters, cabbage, a slice of ham, some oat-meal and a bit o' coffee that makes my mouth water."

"Who told you to bring me my breakfast?" asked Clip.

The boy grinned.

"You're not to give anything away, I see," continued Clip. "You are playing just the sort of game you were to play—not to tell anything, but to do what you have been ordered to do, and when it is done to go off with a closed mouth. Isn't that it?"

"That's about it," said the big boy.

Clever Clip advanced toward the meal, but in reality was eager to get closer to his jailer.

"When am I to get out of here?" he demanded.

"I can't tell you."

"He didn't give you that part of the secret, then?"

The young jailer shook his head.

"Don't you know that they have no right to keep me in this house? Don't you know, too, that you are getting yourself into a desperate pickle by helping the man in whose pay you are?"

No answer.

"You will be hunted down some time and that by the police. You can't play this game through and have a good time on the money you are to get for your part of it."

"Why don't you eat yer pertaters? They'll get cold if you don't turn yer attention to them."

Clip stepped deliberately between the breakfast and the boy at the door.

"You must let me out of this," he said. "I am here against my will and if you don't open the door behind you I will raise the alarm and have the cops down upon us in a jiffy."

"The cops couldn't hear you. They don't listen for anything in this alley. You might holler till you're hoarse and they wouldn't leave their beats out yonder."

Clip felt from the boy's manner that this was terribly true. He was like a person buried alive; the loudest cry he might let out would

not betray the situation to the guardians of the city.

But he had resolved to get out, and that through the coming of the young overgrown jailer.

The big boy was in Jack Jeffers's pay; there was no doubt of this for Jeffers had brought him (Clip) to the house and left him there, and of course he had secured the services of the boy on account of his secretiveness and strength.

"Look here," resumed Clip, suddenly seizing the chair and endangering the breakfast deposited upon it. "You shall not keep me here. I have a right to be outside and you know it too well."

"Well, get out—if you can!" sneered the young jailer.

This was enough to heat every drop of Clever Clip's blood and the next moment, with the chair above his head, he started forward and made a pass at his foe.

The big boy threw up his hands and tried to seize the chair, but failing in this, attempted to knock it out of the young ferret's hands.

In doing so he fell back against the door and for a moment was at Clip's mercy.

"Open the door!" cried the imprisoned Clip. "Open it now or I'll dash your brains out and leave you here to be found by the police."

"Don't! don't!" cried the big boy. "Don't hit me and I'll do anything."

Clip, almost laughing outright at the situation, fell back to let the boy get up and when the fellow scrambled to his feet and exhibited a bunch of keys, he thought himself at the door of freedom.

But all at once the big boy opened the door and darting through the opening was about to make his escape leaving a locked portal behind him, when Clip thrust one of the legs of the chair before the door.

Bang went the door against the leg and the boy who clutched the knob was thrown headlong to the floor in the hall, which enabled the young ferret to grasp the door and throw it open again.

But the moment he was in the hall he saw the big boy spring up and fly at him with the frenzy of an enraged panther.

The Battery Ferret was seized by the large hands and thrown against the wall, but fortunately he did not strike it fairly or it might have been the last of him, and when the big boy tried to follow up his advantage, he slipped through his fingers and fled down the corridor.

There was a door at the end of the corridor, which was not very long, and when he grabbed its knob he saw the jailer in full chase.

"You can't get out! You are in the grip of doom!" cried the big boy, rushing down upon Clever Clip with the speed of a cheetah. "I am going to keep you here until he tells me to either kill you or let you go."

Clip wrenched the knob with all his strength and just as the hand of the boy was about to close on him, something yielded and the insecure lock of the door broke off with a snap and with a cry of joy the boy detective tore it open.

The pursuing jailer ran against the swinging door which struck him in the face landing him on his back in the corridor, and looking at him over his shoulder, Clip ran on, reaching a room through which he plunged with all his might.

It was a race for life as he had realized from the very beginning, and eager to get beyond the walls of the house which had detained him, he did not slacken his speed until he opened the last door and found before him the dark alley down which he had tracked Jack Jeffers to his sorrow.

Clever Clip ran on until, emerging upon the street, he turned and looked back expecting to see the big boy after him with the same vim that had characterized his first efforts; but he was agreeably disappointed, and then, turning away, he vanished from the neighborhood as soon as possible.

"It was a close call and I don't want any more like it," said he to himself. "I'd rather not meet a boy like that again. Now, I am out and my first duty is to get a snack where I won't have to eat under a pair of fox-like eyes and where I can pay for what I get."

He walked off and at last entering the old restaurant, he ordered a breakfast and fell to with a zest that attracted those who waited on the patrons of the house.

The Battery Butterfly enjoyed the meal and when it had been fully discussed he paid his score and, rising, said with resolution:

"Now for getting even and bringing somebody to justice! Look out, Nabb, Nippem and Jeffers. This is my inning and I'm going to see that it is a blooming success."

CHAPTER XIV.

HAWK AND DOVE.

NOT at all haunted by the shadow of the crime committed in the office of Nabb & Nippem, Jack Jeffers went about his business of getting both Gusta Muller and her fortune with the coolness that characterized all his movements.

The astute police and the ever vigilant detectives did not suspect him at all, and while they were looking elsewhere for a clue to the murder mystery of the Belgium Block, Jeffers walked down that very street and laid his plans, as if he had not taken human life in a moment of passion.

Of one thing he was certain: Nicholas Nabb was out of his way and never would he carry out his part of the bargain, whatever it was, with Poke Parsons, the heir-finder.

The man from over-sea was studying out a plan by which he might overcome Gusta Muller's repugnance and secure both the girl and the second fortune which would vanish as completely as the first had done if he once got his hand on it.

He laughed to himself when he thought of Gusta's refusal to become his wife and he resolved not to visit the Mullers again until the girl had had time for reflection.

But he thought it best to watch the premises for she might suddenly vacate the place and by vanishing interfere in a serious manner with his game.

In order to do this he rented a small room just opposite the new home of the Mullers, and set himself to work to keep an eye on the doll-maker's doorway.

He had been careful to disguise himself by shaving off his beard, and to rent the room under an assumed name, all of which seemed just the thing needed to carry out his scheme.

Many an hour he spent at the front window, hidden from observation from the street, and when he grew a little tired he would resort to a cigar, but still he hung to the window as if to leave it might ruin all his plans.

The more Gusta Muller thought over what had taken place between her and the man in whom she had once trusted, the more she saw through his rank duplicity.

She came to believe that instead of being her friend, Jack Jeffers was a grand rascal who was trying to beat her and little Paul out of their rights, and one afternoon she said to her brother, in earnest tones:

"We are going away to-night, Paul."

"Not from this house, Gusta?"

"Yes, we must."

"Will we go back to the old place?"

"No, they might find us there," answered the doll-maker with a shudder. "We won't go back there, Paul. I don't know exactly where we will stop, but this is not the place for us."

Paul looked inquisitively into his sister's face, but did not question her.

"I think I know now why Clip doesn't come," she went on. "That man, Jack Jeffers, never told him where we were, and he is keeping the boy away for a purpose of his own."

"Why not write Martin?"

"Not yet. I don't want to worry him, but the time must come when he will know everything."

Gusta watched the falling shadows, and when night came she took Paul by the hand and led him from the room.

"What, ain't we going to take anything with us?" asked the little German boy, looking up into Gusta's face.

"Not now. We will send for our things if we find a new place," was the reply. "We can't take anything off now, for that would betray us, Paul. This must be a flight without any baggage."

The boy said no more, and Gusta conducted him down upon the lighted streets of the great city.

She scarcely knew where to go. She had never been abroad much after dark, and the streets were a labyrinth to her, turn which way she might. She was confused by the glare of the lights, and for a moment she and Paul stood on the sidewalk, almost regretting the step they had taken.

"I must get beyond the power of that man," was the thought that filled the girl's mind. "I can't let him carry out his threat and I will never break my promise to Martin."

By and by she led Paul away, not dreaming that a face had left a window opposite their home; nor that the owner of it was on the street sneaking after them at that very moment like a spy.

Gusta had a friend, a German girl who made dolls like herself, and though she had visited her but twice, she still remembered the street and number.

She approached a policeman who stood on a corner and asked him to direct her to the street inhabited by her friend.

"It's on the other side of the city," said the officer, looking down at little Paul whose rosy face attracted him as if it reminded him of little faces at home. "But, dear me, you don't intend to walk all the way?"

"Yes, all the way. I'll lead Paul and he won't get tired for he knows why we are going to Mina's house."

The officer gave the fugitives the proper directions and even walked a few yards with them, after which he watched them out of sight as if he feared to let them get beyond his helping hand.

It was a long way sure enough, but Gusta, blessed with an excellent memory, treasured up the directions given by the policeman and made good progress despite her limited knowledge of city life.

Not a murmur fell from Paul's lips as they hurried on.

At last Gusta stopped and looked confused. The maze of streets dazed her as it were and she was seen to look all around her like a person lost.

All this time, watching the children with the eye of the night-hawk, was the owner of the eyes which had seen them desert the house which had last sheltered them.

Jackson Jeffers was still on the trail and he had kept so close to the fugitives watching them with his keen eyes and tracking them up one street and down another, all the time wondering whither they were going.

"They are lost. Gusta has lost her bearings and don't know how to recover them," he said, half aloud.

At length he saw the Mullers walk up to a man who stood in a doorway and address him. Jeffers watched the man point out the way and then seem to give the pretty German girl some advice for being out unprotected in that part of the city.

Gusta and little Paul started on once more with the tiger at their heels, and when they reached the street where Gusta's friend lived Jeffers saw them spring forward with renewed hopes.

"They must be near the place. I guess I've run them down and when I have done so, I will know where I can lay my hand on them when I want 'em."

Gusta watched the numbers of the dwellings with a great deal of interest and when she came to a certain one she said something to Paul and they stopped.

The next moment the girl had run up a pair of steps and was knocking.

She knocked again and again, but no one came to the door.

Paul wondered why this was so and told Gusta to hammer with all her might, which made the doll-maker smile.

At last a response came to the girl's knocking, but not in the manner she desired.

A window near the door was opened and a female head became visible.

"Who do ye want?" exclaimed a shrill screechy voice.

"We want to see Mina."

"The girl what makes dolls for the gentleman down-town?"

"Yes."

"Well, ye'll have ter look for her on the ither side o' the city. She wint off the other day an' said she guessed she'd not come back any more."

Gusta seemed to sink to the ground. What, Mina gone, and all their long walk across the city for nothing? It was enough to weaken and completely unnerve her.

Slowly, with her hand tightening at little Paul's wrist, the doll-maker turned away as the window closed.

Her face was white and her lips seemed to sweat blood.

Going back to the old house seemed like entering the door of a prison.

Gusta Muller looked all about her for refuge and then turned toward the corner which they had rounded only a few moments before with hope in their hearts.

The human hawk came nearer and saw with delight the fear that showed itself in the German girl's manners.

"I have her now!" he said under his breath. "I have not tracked this rich prize for nothing."

With swift steps he descended upon the pair and was about to acquaint them with his presence when a man stepped between him and the Mullers.

"Curse him! that spoils my little game," he grated through closed teeth. "I didn't see him till this moment."

The man who had come between was tall and giant-like in proportions and had about him the look of an officer.

"You are lost," he said gently to Gusta. "Let me be of some service to you?"

"You?" cried the girl drawing back.

"Yes, I am Captain Cupid of the detective service and I think I know who you are."

"I wish you were at the bottom of the river, Captain Cupid!" said the hawk, drawing back into the shadows once more.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. NIPPEM IS NABBED.

CAPTAIN CUPID, whose heart was overflowing with kindness and good-nature, smiled on the Mullers and led them down the street, drawing from Gusta as they proceeded as much of her story as she cared to tell.

When the doll-maker discovered that the captain knew Clip, she eagerly asked after the boy, but the detective could not give her any satisfaction; so she had to give up her questionings on this subject.

"I can take you to my sister's for the present," said the detective. "She lives in Bleeker street and in a comparatively quiet neighborhood. She will be glad to see you and you can remain with her till you find other quarters."

"All right, captain; take 'em to Bleeker street," said the man who overheard these words. "I don't care where you take 'em; I intend to win this game, anyhow."

Some time after these events Gusta Muller and little Paul found themselves the inmates of a neat and quiet home, and Captain Cupid's sister, a matronly widow, assured them that they should occupy her house just as long as they desired.

When Jack Jeffers found his victims hidden once more, he went back and ran up the stairs that led to his lodgings.

"I was about to pull them in again, but that big detective had to interfere which spoiled my game for the time," he said. "I will have to work another lay which I can do and yet get the Australian fortune and maybe the German wife."

He was still in the room when footfalls came up the steps, and when he opened the door he saw standing before him Solon Nippem, the remaining partner of the firm of Nabb & Nippem.

The hatchet-faced man who had been frightened by the strange death of Nicholas Nabb, came gliding across the room with a noiseless tread and when he dropped into a chair Jeffers saw how intensely white he was.

"Look here," he said. "I thought you were going to get rid of that troublesome boy."

"What boy?"

"Why, the one poor Nabb pointed out to you from the office the other day."

"Oh, he's all right."

"I don't know about that. When he sneaks into one's office and sneaks out like a ghost, I don't call that 'all right'."

Jack Jeffers saw how earnest Nippem was, and coming nearer to him he demanded to know just what he meant.

"The boy is looking for somebody," the lawyer went on. "He was in the office tonight for I saw him drop into the hall from over the transom."

"Heavens! you didn't see that, did you?"

"Why didn't I? And you tell me that we have no cause to fear a boy like that."

"But I sent him up of my own accord. I had fixed him, and now you say that you saw him come out of the office by the transom?"

"I did. I was just mounting the stairs into the hall when I saw what I have described by the light in the corridor. Why didn't I grab the young jackanapes? Truth to tell, the sight fairly shocked me and when I recovered I found myself on the way to your lodgings, for you had told us that the boy should hurt no one."

Jeffers looked at the man in the chair as if still half-doubting his sanity, but aside from being scared and unnerved, there was nothing the matter with him.

"You'll have to let me go somewhere before I can take all this down," he said. "I must visit a certain place in this city."

"When will you return?"

"Inside of an hour."

"But I saw the boy—the one called the Battery Butterfly and that girl's friend. I couldn't have been fooled, for my eyes are pretty keen yet if they have looked out of this head for fifty years. I have had strange thoughts since some one killed Nabb in the office and I intend to move as soon as possible. I say, isn't it strange that they can't get a clue to that murder?"

Jeffers, with the coolness of a desperado, said it was very strange, whereupon Nippem suggested that perhaps Nabb, in a fit of passion or remorse, had choked himself to death.

Leaving Nippem to keep house for him, Jack Jeffers readjusted the facial disguise and slipped down-stairs.

He made his way as rapidly and as quietly as he could to that part of the city where he had left Clever Clip in durance and unlocked the house with a key which he took from his pocket.

Everything was quiet and this for a time gave the lie to Nippem's experience, but when he opened the door that ushered him into the room where he had left the boy ferret, he stopped short and then staggered back.

It was untenanted.

"Gone—got away!" he cried. "I wonder if he came the same game on Davy that he did on Mrs. Flounder. I can't believe it, for the boy was unsympathetic and had nothing at stake save the money I was to pay him. But the Battery Butterfly has taken wing and I am left in the lurch. Now what will be do? Turn on me? Why not?"

Jack Jeffers turned and went back to the front room. The whole house seemed deserted by every one but himself, and for a moment he stood in the dim light that prevailed.

"Old Nippem must have seen the boy," he said at last. "The old shark didn't use his eyes for nothing while he stood on the stair, and here, while I have settled with Nabb who was getting out of his pasture, I find this boy still in the ring."

Jeffers pulled his hat down over his face and went out again.

He went back to where he had left Nippem and found that person eagerly awaiting him.

"Well?" asked the lawyer when Jeffers came in.

"You are right; the boy is at large."

Nippem bounded from his chair like a jumping jack.

"You know what that means, don't you, Jackson?" he cried.

"What, Solon?"

"It means revenge; it means that the boy, who is the friend of the German girl, will try and find who had a hand in taking that trunk and the fortune that was in it."

Jack curled his lips derisively.

"Well, what if he does?" he said.

"What if he brings the detectives to his aid?"

"You're frightened, ain't you, Nippem?"

"I'm not feeling very good, that's a fact."

"Then, you can withdraw from the game. You don't have to stay in it. Haven't you got your share of the swag? Wasn't it an even divide? And aren't you satisfied?"

"Yes," said Nippem hesitatingly.

"If you don't like the looks of things all you have to do is to quit the city till the hunt blows over. You know where to go without any advice from me."

There was no reply, Nippem all the time watching Jack with the cunning of a hawk.

"And you?" he asked at last.

"Oh, I don't run off. When a tiger gets out of its cage the best thing to be done is to go to work and put it back with as little delay as possible."

"Do you think you can corral this boy ferret again?"

"Why not? Didn't I have him in the trap once before? Don't I learn some things by experience?"

"If I thought you would do this thing soon—"

"Don't depend on that. I might fail. I would advise you to go off for a spell—say for a week or two. If everything goes well you can come back."

"But I would like to help the police solve the murder in the office. I would like to know who killed Nicholas."

Jack Jeffers, the man with the dark secret, said nothing and did not so much as change color.

He looked at Nippem and even smiled when he said that the death of Nabb might be one of the unsolvable secrets of the police, and then the lawyer shark said he would take Jack's advice and leave the city.

This determined on it was agreed that Jack should write Nippem how things were progressing, and when the two men shook hands and the cool-head from over sea heard the footsteps of Nippem on the stair, a laugh arose to his lips.

"This leaves me just where I have wanted to be all this while—the sole man in the game and with no one to share my secrets. Now, I am ready to beat the play and come out on top. Nippem is gone for good for he isn't one of these men who came back where danger lurks. I am the sole man against the field, and the field can't win. It isn't in the deck."

If he had followed Solon Nippem he would have seen him go back to his office and strike a light there. For some time he looked through the various desks and then wrote out a placard which he stuck on the outside of the door.

"That will do," he said, falling back and looking at his work, which read: "Out of town for a few days," and then the last member of Nabb & Nippem turned to go down the street.

But all at once a shadow fell along the wall over the steps and as he stopped he caught sight of a figure which in the uncertain light looked as gigantic as Og, King of Bashan.

"Great heavens! the police," cried Nippem, feeling his limbs giving way under him, and the next second he was clutched by a hand that seemed to sink to the bone.

"Let's go into the office and talk there," said the lawyer's captor.

"Yes, into the office. I'm willing to tell you everything, but I don't know who killed Nicholas. All I can tell is about the taking of the trunk with the German money hid in it. And, what is more, I'm willing to give up every dollar I received," and the cowardly wretch was taken back into the office where he fell breathless into his revolving chair.

CHAPTER XVI.

BACK IN THE TOILS.

ONCE more out of durance, the Battery Ferret was free to act against the men who had conspired to rob the Mullers of their all, and while he did not know what kind of snares Jack Jeffers would set for him, he had resolved that no fear of the man should thwart him.

It was the same night of the events we have just detailed, and while Solon Nippem was in the hands of the officer who had come upon him on the stair.

The figure of the Battery Butterfly came round a corner not far from the river, and seemed to be watching a man who was walking rapidly toward the nearest ferry.

Clip knew the man, though he was somewhat disguised, and when he had followed him into the ferry-house, and was about to approach him for a better view, he was suddenly caught from behind, and he looked up into Captain Cupid's face.

The old detective, who was the boy's stanch friend, had been looking for him ever since he conducted the Mullers to his sister's on Bleecker street, and his face showed that he had something of importance to communicate.

Clip's countenance brightened while he listened to Captain Cupid, and when the old man had told his story he turned to look for Jack Jeffers, the man he had tracked to the ferry, but he had vanished.

"Never mind; this fellow will turn up again," said Captain Cupid. "He's not one of the kind that keeps out of harm's road very long. We will get the grip on him ere long, Clip, and there will be a settlement of some things that will even others up."

The officer and the Butterfly walked from the ferry-house and were watched, though they knew it not, by the very man who had given Clip the slip.

Not long thereafter the boy appeared suddenly to the Mullers, and little Paul received him with delight.

Gusta told him how she had discovered that Jack Jeffers was playing against them, and that she believed that he had made another discovery as great as the one he had made previous to the theft of the trunk.

All this was said in presence of Captain Cupid who wondered if it could be true that another fortune was coming to the girl.

"If any one knows of this it will be 'Poke' Parsons," said the detective. "But this man is as great a rascal as Jack himself. He knows Jeffers and there may be a conspiracy between the two."

"I know Poke Parsons," said Clip. "I had occasion last summer to air a little scheme of

his and he hasn't the best of feelings toward me. If he knows anything about the new fortune he is apt to play the hand he holds for all there is in it, and he seems to know all who have legacies coming to them."

It was decided that Captain Cupid should by some means meet Poke Parsons, the heir-finder, and get all out of him he could concerning the second legacy supposed to belong to the Mullers.

Half an hour later Clip was on the street once more, and going home, a place which he had been forced to neglect for some time, he found on his table a note which he opened and read with a good deal of surprise.

"I don't see why Bunce, the boy of the Battery, should write to me," he said. "It is just like him, however. He helped me a little the day I discovered the theft of the trunk, and if he was here during my absence he concluded not to wait, but threw this note over the transom and upon the table.

Clip knew where Bunce lived and setting out at once he was soon in the neighborhood.

Slipping down the alley-like street which he thought would land him at the boy's door, he was suddenly apprised of the startling fact that he was not the only person in that part of the city.

A man stepped into his path, a man who seemed to advance with a pair of flashing eyes riveted upon him.

Clever Clip stopped, then drew back and the next moment felt his heart by one great bound leap into his throat.

Jack Jeffers!

The cunning of the man from over-sea was upmost again.

There was something so terrible in the aspect of the man who came toward him in the dim light of the alley, that for a moment his limbs refused to act and he stood ready to be taken in by the same hands that had captured him once before.

But suddenly the full horror of the situation seized the boy and by a quick movement he sprung out of the rascal's road and in another second was running with all his speed from the spot toward the street which he had deserted for the alley.

If Clip was fleet of foot, the man at his heels was fleeter, for all at once a hand dropped upon his shoulder and he was jerked back and almost lifted from the ground.

The Battery Butterfly whirled the moment the hand closed on him and seeing the gleaming eyes and cool face of Jack Jeffers near his own, he struck with all his might, landing a blow between the man's eyes and staggering him for a moment.

"Not quite so fast! This time you are sealed for doom!" was hissed at his ear while the grip did not relax. "I will see this time that I am my own jailer. No failures any more."

"You rascal, you ought to have been hanged when they let you go," said the boy ferret, drawing his figure to its true height and looking the man undauntedly in the face. "You will swing yet for you've cheated the law out of a victim long enough."

"Never mind," laughed Jack. "We'll discuss this question in another place, so come along and see what I have prepared for you."

Clip wondered if he was to be taken back to the house where he had fought his way clear of the big boy; but he soon found that he was not.

Jack conducted his charge out of the alley and across the street, but took good care not to collide with a policeman, as that would have been disastrous, and ten minutes after his capture, the Battery Butterfly found himself in-doors and under a strange roof with no big boys in sight.

"This is where I can watch you myself," announced Jack, pushing Clip to a chair. "You see I have more than one trap for such rats. What were you after in that alley? Did you really think you would find your friend, Bunce, at home, and were you really fooled by the note you found on your table?"

What a revelation those words were!

Clip knew that the note had been written by Jack Jeffers for the purpose of decoying him back into his clutches, and he hated himself when he realized how nicely he had been caught.

But then, they would have deceived the sharpest, and this was something in his favor.

For a little while Jack Jeffers stood off and watched his little prisoner with the smile of the adroit scoundrel.

He knew the value of the prize he had taken; he knew that while Clever Clip was at large he could not win the golden stakes of the game.

"Did you fight your way out of the other trap?" asked Jeffers. "Or did you play the

sympathy racket to perfection as you did with Mrs. Flounder?"

"Find out when you have time," answered the boy, which so angered the crook that he sprung forward and admonished him to be careful how he used his tongue in his replies, at the same time saying that he was in the deadliest trap a boy had ever found himself, something which Clever Clip could readily believe.

"I don't intend to bungle the job this time," assured Jack, stopping long enough to open a door in the floor.

The Battery Butterfly watched. He saw a dark, pit-like place yawn beneath the floor and when his captor turned he noticed a gleam of desperate triumph in his baleful eyes.

Then the man seized Clip by the arm.

"This way to the Styx!" he laughed, dragging Clip across the floor. "The route is a clear one and you can't miss it."

Clip involuntarily drew back, his gaze riveted upon the yawning hole, but the brute's strength was overpowering and the lad stood at the very edge of the pit.

Then he saw a ladder.

"Go down!" commanded Jeffers. "Go down and see what is at the foot of the ladder!"

Clip hesitated.

"You don't hesitate even to commit murder," he cried, looking into the merciless face of the man.

"Do you think I don't? Well, you must know that I don't intend to have any stones in my path. I am getting rid of them one by one and as you're one of them, you are to get out of the way. Go down the ladder!"

Clip was forced nearer to the opening and one of his feet touched the upper round.

"Keep on to the bottom," ordered Jack. "You won't find it a very long journey. There you are; and now duck your head, for down comes the door!"

The heavy door was falling, and in order to escape a stunning blow, Clip ducked his head and the trap was shut!

He was on the ladder with pitch darkness on every hand!

Putting up his hand, he felt the door, but it seemed as solid as the floor.

"I'll go down and see what's there. I have matches," thought the Battery Butterfly, and he went down round after round, uncertain of the outcome of his terrible venture in the dark.

CHAPTER XVII.

TRACKED BY TWO.

"TRAPPED forever!" said Jeffers to himself when he departed from the house in which he had left the boy ferret to die in the pit beneath the floor. "I have been looking for the young rat some time, and having captured him for the third time, I will see that he remains where he is and that he no longer interferes with the little game I have on hand."

The man from over-sea whistled as he hurried away and after awhile turned up in his old room, this time to see no Nippem in the chair waiting for his return.

He knew what had become of the Mullers, having followed Captain Cupid home with them, and he was sure that he could put his hand on Gusta whenever he wanted her.

Meantime the boy in the pit was having one of the most thrilling adventures of his life.

He had reached the bottom of the pit to find it dark and damp.

It turned out to be a cellar-like place with dripping walls, the moisture of which stuck to his hands as he passed them over the cold stones.

A chill passed over the boy's frame and for some time he leaned against the ladder, fairly sickened at heart with the terror of his situation.

"I am in it again," he said with doleful humor. "Now I must get out if I can. I have fallen back into the power of the greatest rascal in New York and if I don't get out of my own accord he will win the play against Gusta and little Paul and the Mullers will feel the blight of his hand."

Clever Clip made the rounds of the dungeon and for some time failed to discover the slightest break in the wall.

Everything was dark and gloomy and when he struck a match a puff of air from somewhere put it out.

Clip tried again and again and at last, by igniting a bit of paper which he found in one of his pockets, succeeded in maintaining a light which burned.

With this he made the "grand rounds" again

and found that the place was larger than he thought and that the air came from an opening near the base of one of the four walls.

In another moment the Battery Butterfly was on his knees looking into the opening and wondering where it led.

"It might lead to a trap as dark as this one," he thought. "There is no telling whether it would lead me, but, anything is better than this place."

He discovered that the opening led straight ahead, and after examining it as best he could with the light he had, he shut his teeth hard and crawled into the passage, if such it was.

It was a terrible place, as the Battery Ferret soon discovered, but he persevered and at last was stopped by what appeared to be a door set in a bard floor overhead.

Clip stood up and tried to open the door, but could not.

He knew that after entering the corridor underground he had crawled gradually upward and believed that he must be nearly on a level with the trap into which Jack Jeffers had forced him in the unknown house.

To go back was not to be thought of so long as a door was near, and presently Clip broke the silence by hammering on the portal with his knife.

The hammering made a hollow sound which was not answered for some time, and all at once he heard a child's voice and then a woman's.

Clever Clip held his breath with a stilled heart in his bosom.

"Who's there?" said a voice.

"Open the door and see. I am a friend, not a foe, and you will do me a great favor by letting me out of this place."

"Where did you come from?"

"I can't tell you, but when I am out I will give you all the information I can."

"Let him out, mother. He may be some poor man who has been cooped up in the dark."

It was the unseen child pleading for Clip and the Battery Butterfly inwardly blessed the little one.

By and by there was a rattling of bolts and the door opened upward.

The Battery Ferret drew himself out of the hole with as much agility as he could and stood before a middle-aged woman and a crippled boy who leaned on a crutch.

"Whew, it's a boy," cried the little fellow, catching sight of Jack Jeffers's victim.

"Right you are," said Clip. "I'm not a man yet, but some rascals will think I'm a giant before to-morrow night."

"You've been cooped up, have you?" put in the woman.

"I've been buried alive, for that was the man's intention. Do you know where the corridor down there leads to?"

Both woman and child shook their heads.

"We never dared investigate," the former said. "We have lived here six months and have feared to look under the floor very far. I'm glad to be able to help you and if you don't want to tell us all, it's all right."

Clip thanked the pair again and promised to come back some time and tell them how he came to be under the floor.

"Something has to be done at once or the game may escape me," he explained. "I can't afford to fool with the rascals who are at the head of the conspiracy. Some other time, as you say, I will come back and, if everything goes O. K., you sha'n't be forgotten."

He shook hands with the woman and the little boy and was soon out on the street, this time with resolution and eagerness dancing in his eyes.

His imprisonment had been brief, but he had had enough of it, and the lucky escape filled him with joy as he flitted under the lamps of Gotham and turned at last up the steps that led to his own little lodgings on the second floor.

Clip wondered what had followed his descent into the pit of darkness. Had Jack Jeffers gone back to his friend Nippem and told him how he had trapped him; or had he returned to his game against Gusta Muller with the full intention of playing it out without further delay?"

He was anxious to see what had become of the man from over-sea and after a brief rest in his room, he sallied out once more, resolved not to return to the old quarters till the whole game had been played out and the conspiracy against the two orphans broken up.

He found a light in Jack's window and, watching it for some time, he thought he saw shadows on the curtain as if there were several persons in the room.

At length the figure of a man came into view

and stopped on the sidewalk in front of the hallway.

It was Jack's!

Clip drew into the shadows and watched this man for some time.

"What is to be the next move?" he asked himself in inaudible tones. "Which way now, Jack Jeffers?"

The head plotter of the trio started off and had not gone far when Clip noticed that he was being watched by a man on the opposite side of the street.

"It's Captain Cupid and he is trying to get ahead of me. I don't want the old man to beat me to the stakes, for this is my prey and if Cupid wins, where will my glory come in?"

Clip saw Jack dodge into an alley, but the next minute he came forth again and went off at a rapid pace.

Captain Cupid also increased his gait and when the boy ferret saw the detective cross the street, as if for the purpose of stopping Jack on his tramp, he ran forward and caught the old man's arm.

"Clip, my boy!" cried Captain Cupid, taken aback by the sudden appearance.

"You are trying to cheat me out of my share of the game," said the Butterfly.

"Not that, but I am after the head villain of the plot and if he escapes us now we may have a time with him hereafter."

"Don't you intend to arrest him?"

"Certainly, just as soon as I can get my hands on him."

"I thought so. But I don't want him taken here."

"You don't, eh?"

"What proof have we?" asked Clip. "I know what I know; but we want something more positive."

"Are you talking about the theft of the trunk and the attempt to get Gusta's new fortune?"

"Yes, I am."

"Well, I am not," said the detective coolly.

"What, then?"

"I want him for a greater crime than either of those. I want the oily scamp for murder."

Clever Clip recoiled with a cry while he gave the old officer a strange look.

"For murder?" he echoed.

"I am almost sure that that man yonder killed Nicholas Nabb."

The boy of the Battery glanced toward the man still in sight and then looked up into the detective's face.

"Don't ask me what proof I have. Crime always blunders, you can depend on it for that," and with this Captain Cupid broke away and started after the vanishing form.

"Wanted for more than one piece of villainy, eh?" said the boy. "I will see that he doesn't get out of the meshes this time," and running forward he distanced Captain Cupid and in a jiffy came close to the tracked man.

Jack Jeffers did not seem to notice that he was trailed, for the two friends had carried on their work with secrecy, but it seemed that he carried an eye in the back part of his head and under his hat rim, for no sooner had the boy come within hailing distance than he turned and vanished.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LUCK AND PLUCK WIN.

SOLON NIPPEM who had fallen into the hands of an officer, as we have witnessed, had turned State's evidence and told everything he knew about the theft of the trunk and the conspiracy to deprive the Muller children of their own.

The rascal, brought to bay at last after a career of duplicity and crime, was a coward, as was shown by his eagerness to tell all he knew, and while Clever Clip and Detective Cupid were following Jack Jeffers, the frightened Nippem was occupying a cell in a station-house and wondering what would be done with him.

He knew nothing of the real cause of Nabb's death, though he had heard that his old partner had been murdered by some one. He was thankful it had been Nabb and not him, and when he reflected, he wondered why it was so.

Gusta Muller was at home with Captain Cupid's sister who had already taken a liking to little Paul, and the children began to think that at last they were out of the shadows and no longer molested by a lot of evil men like Jack Jeffers.

Gusta went back to her work and little Paul said he would learn to paint the faces of the dolls, and in time earn something for both Gusta and himself.

The German girl had resolved not to show herself in the street without permission and

she and Paul remained in-doors for fear of falling under the evil eye of the man who had plotted their destruction.

But on the night of the events we have just recorded girlish curiosity got the better of Gusta Muller, and she went to the door to look down the lighted street.

That part of the city was new and strange to her. She had never seen it before and when she reached the door she tarried there long enough to be seen by a man who stood on the opposite side of the street and whose hawk-like eyes regarded her with all their malignity.

This person watched Gusta until she closed the door and the next moment he crossed the street and rapped on the portal.

Gusta was still in the hall and she and little Paul were the only occupants of the house at the time.

Hearing the rap, the German girl went back and opened the door again.

"Is this Captain Cupid's sister's house?" asked the man, whose hat was drawn down over his forehead concealing a part of his face which was covered with a soft, brownish beard.

"It is, sir."

"Then, I guess some of you are wanted down at the drug store on the corner."

"What for?" asked Gusta, interested and not suspicious.

"The captain is there, a little hurt, and I was sent by the doctor to tell some of you to come to him at once."

Gusta started. Captain Cupid hurt and needing assistance?

No wonder it shocked her.

"I will go," she said. "Paul, you will keep house a moment. I won't be gone long. Is Mrs. Nugent there with him?"

"Not yet, but they have gone for her," was the reply, and in another moment the sharper's victim was going down the street with him.

There was a drug-store on the nearest corner, as Gusta had observed when coming to the house, and she was on the lookout for it, expecting to see a crowd gathered in front of it; but she saw nothing of the kind.

Suddenly the hand of the man gripped her arm and she was stopped in the middle of the sidewalk.

"We won't go there just yet," was what she heard spoken in a different tone from that lately used by the villain. "We will let Captain Cupid go. He is good enough to bait a trap with and that's about all!"

The truth went through the German girl like an arrow, and falling back she looked into the eyes that gleamed like burning coals and made the most startling discovery of her life.

She had been caught by Jack Jeffers!

"You know me, eh?" grinned the man. "I told you that I would beggar both you and Paul unless you came under my thumb and submitted to my fair proposition. The new fortune can never become yours unless you become my wife—"

Gusta threw up her hand and seized his arm.

"I can't! I have told you so. I am Martin's betrothed and I am willing to let the fortune go rather than deceive him."

She was met with a derisive laugh, and finding herself being taken from the spot, she tried to wrench herself loose from the iron grip which only seemed to tighten with every movement she made.

All at once a swooning fear took possession of the German girl.

She thought of little Paul being left alone in the world and without her protection!

She pictured him turned out of doors by those who had given them shelter, and with this fear at her heart, the poor girl was sinking to the sidewalk when she felt herself caught up and carried off.

This was her last recollection, and with everything dark about her she tried to cry out for help, but the words seemed to die on her lips.

Back in Jack Jeffers's power!

No wonder it brought darkness and despair to the German girl; no wonder, with her last thoughts of little Paul, she gave up and struggled no longer.

It is just three days after Gusta's adventure on the street near Mrs. Nugent's house, and a man seemingly at peace with the world sits in an up-stairs room with a cigar between his white teeth and a paper on the table before him.

"I can hold them to it," he mutters. "That paper makes the bargain and binds them all. I am not to be arrested, but, on the contrary, am to receive twenty thousand dollars of the Australian fortune which is due the Mullers, besides being allowed to get out of the city. It wasn't

such a bad job after all. Of course I've lost a wife, which means that I will lose a good deal more money than I gain, but to get off this well is remarkable after what I believe Nippem has let out. They don't know where I am, and the paper won't give me away until the right time comes."

Jack Jeffers looked at the paper on the table and took a fresh cigar.

He had played a remarkable hand since his capture of Gusta on the street.

In short, through one of the city newspapers, he had carried on a correspondence with the girl's friends, and it had been agreed that he should escape—that, in addition to his freedom, he should receive the sum of twenty thousand dollars of the fortune which Poke Parsons, the heir-finder, had found for the Mullers, and that he should be permitted to get out of the city, which meant that the death of Nicholas Nabb should go unavenged.

He was now awaiting the signing of the agreement by an agent of the parties with whom he had been dealing, for these conditions had been solemnly agreed to by Captain Cupid, and he was expecting the detective, who was a man of his word.

As the hours waned Jack looked at his watch and wondered what detained the captain.

Presently, at the eleventh hour, a footstep came up the steps and approached the door.

The handsome man seemed to hold his breath.

"Come in," he called out.

But the door did not open.

"Wasn't it my visitor?" he asked, rising and crossing the room. He opened the door to be confronted by a boy and a man from whom he retreated with a cry of astonishment.

"That is the man. That is Jackson Jeffers, the person we want, and we have him now, at last."

It was the boy who spoke.

The man from over-sea retreated still further, and his hand slipped to his hip, but not quick enough for the person who went across the threshold with the spring of a tiger.

"I wasn't in the bargain, Jack," said Clever Clip, coming into the room and watching the officer manacle his prisoner. "I refused to compromise and Captain Cupid did what he did to give me a chance to ferret you out."

There was a display of teeth and a muttered curse and the man who played a bold hand for a fortune went down the stairs with handcuffs on his wrists.

"The next time, my young rat, I will throttle you outright!" he muttered, viciously.

"There'll be no 'next time,'" was the reply accompanied by a smile which made the rascal almost furious.

It was some time before the sullen Jeffers would give up the clue to Gusta's whereabouts, and when the girl came home she was received with delight by all, especially by little Paul.

Mrs. Flounder now came forward and told all she knew about the plot against the Mullers, and gave the inside history of Jack Jeffers's past life, which was not very complimentary to that adventurer, crook, and consummate plotter.

Jack was taken aback when he learned what Captain Cupid had discovered about the death of Nicholas Nabb. It was a clue which eventually fastened the crime upon the right person; but the head of the conspiracy took his own life before the law could legally strangle him, while Solon Nippem was released for having turned State's evidence and left the city where he had won such an unenviable name.

In course of time, Martin, the lover who had been kept in ignorance of Gusta's trials and dangers, came to claim his own and was made happy not only by getting a wife, but with a promise that the Australian fortune would put her beyond the necessity of making dolls for a living.

Very little of the fortune lost with the old trunk was recovered—the three villains had spent the most of it—but the one from the Australias was ample, and Gusta made Clever Clip a present of such a slice of it that the Butterly of the Battery changed his abode and took almost elegant rooms "up-town."

But for Clip the plot against the Mullers would have succeeded, and Gusta and Paul would have lost not only their home, but perhaps their future happiness.

Mrs. Flounder kept her word with the Battery Ferret by telling the authorities how she escaped being very deep in the infamous plot against the children, and Captain Cupid who, after all, would never have consented to the bargain he had apparently made with Jack Jeffers, was proud of his part in the unravel-

ing of the scheme and the final fortunate outcome.

"I'll tell you what," he often says to Clever Clip. "That trail did you credit. It was one of those to be followed by genius for the work, but only to be won by luck and pluck, and it was a neck-and-neck race between the two."

"Thank you, captain," answers the boy; "I guess Pluck came out a neck ahead."

THE END.

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OR,

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The case is baffling in the extreme, and proves to be, as well, a dangerous one, as Broadway Billy and His Badgers discover before they have been on the scent a week. Danger, however, to the true detective, is a powerful incentive, and Billy and his Boys do some

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